Abraham in John 8,31-59

de Lange, C.C.M.

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ABRAHAM IN JOHN 8,31-59

His Significance in the Conflict between Johannine Christianity & its Jewish Environment

Tineke de Lange

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ERRATATA

Page 15 verse 31b: change λογῷ to λόγῳ.

Page 38 line 13: change ἐλεύθερος to ἐλεύθερος.

Page 38 line 10 from the bottom of the page: change δουλεύῳ to δουλεύω.

Page 38 line 4 from the bottom of the page: change δόξᾳ to δόξα.

Page 39 line 4: change οι ᾽Ιουδαῖοι to οἱ ᾽Ιουδαῖοι.

Page 62 note 46: change πεπιστεύκαμ to πεπιστεύκαμεν.

Page 191 line 8 from the bottom of the page: change οἱ ᾽Ιησοῦς to ὁ ᾽Ιησοῦς.

Page 196 line 11-12: change ἐὰνύμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τ ῷ λογῷ to ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ.

Back cover line 20: change deapseated to deep-seated.

Abraham in John 8,31–59

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His Significance in the Conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish Environment

Abraham in Johannes 8,31–59, zijn betekenis in het conflict tussen Johanneïsch christendom & Joodse omgeving

Tineke de Lange

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PREFACE

The biographical research of this thesis was completed in 2000. In the editing stage of the manuscript, however, I incorporated some additional literature. This thesis is altogether the result of a long and fragmented process of research and editing. The original project started in 1990 at the University of Theology and Pastorate at Heerlen and was taken over by the Catholic University (presently: the Radboud University) Nijmegen. During four years these institutes enabled me to do my work as a junior researcher for this project. Since 1995 however, I have combined the research for this thesis and the subsequent editing of it with my work as an advisor for Religious education (Alkmaar) and a staff member of the Catholic Council for the relations with the Jews (Utrecht), and the raising of two children. For this reason, the road to completion of this thesis became altogether lengthy and sometimes difficult.

During all these years, my promotor, Prof. Dr. M.J.J. Menken, has been an unwavering supporter. I am much indebted to him for his advice and constructive criticism, but above all for his patience, loyalty and encouragement. I also like to thank my copromotor, Dr. J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, for his comments, especially on chapter 3, and the members of the committee instituted by the *Faculty of Catholic Theology* Tilburg University that accepted this thesis, for their comments: Prof. Dr. P. Beentjes, Prof. Dr. M.C. de Boer, and Dr. H.L.M. Ottenheijm.

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Finally, I wish to express my thanks to my friends and relatives, for their interest and care, and to my daughter and son for their sobering remarks. I promise them that my next book will be a very different one.

John 8,31–59

JOHN 8,31–59 [1]

31a ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ
Ἰουδαίους·
31b ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λογῷ τῷ ἐμῷ,
31c ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μού ἐστε
32a καὶ γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν,
32b καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς.
33a ἀπεκρίθησαν πρὸς αὐτόν·
33b σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐσμεν
33c καὶ οὐδενὶ δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε·
33d πῶς σὺ λέγεις ὅτι
33e ἐλεύθεροι γενήσεσθε;
34a ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς·
34b ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι
34c πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν
34d δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας.
35a ὁ δὲ δοῦλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,
35b ὁ υἱὸς μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.
36a ἐὰν οὖν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ,
36b ὄντως ἐλεύθεροι ἔσεσθε.
37a Οἶδα ὅτι σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐστε·
37b ἀλλά ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι,
37c ὅτι ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐμὸς οὐ χωρεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν.
38a ἃ ἐγὼ ἑώρακα παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ λαλῶ·
38b καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν ἃ ἠκούσατε παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ποιεῖτε.
39a ἀπεκρίθησαν καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ·
39b ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ ἐστιν.
39c λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς·
39d εἰ τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἐστε,
39e τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ ἐποιεῖτε·
40a νῦν δὲ ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτεῖναι

1 NA[27] The discussion of text critical problems will be undertaken in the course of this study.

40b ἄνθρωπον ὃς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὑμῖν λελάληκα
40c ἣν ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ·
40d τοῦτο Ἀβραὰμ οὐκ ἐποίησεν.
41a ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν.
41b εἶπαν [οὖν] αὐτῷ·
41c ἡμεῖς ἐκ πορνείας οὐ γεγεννήμεθα,
41d ἕνα πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν θεόν.
42a εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς·
42b εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν
42c ἠγαπᾶτε ἂν ἐμέ,
42d ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἥκω·
42e οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπ᾽ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐλήλυθα,
42f ἀλλ᾽ ἐκεῖνός με ἀπέστειλεν.
43a διὰ τί τὴν λαλιὰν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐ γινώσκετε;
43b ὅτι οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμόν.
44a ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ
44b καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν.
44c ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς
44d καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἔστηκεν,
44e ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ.
44f ὅταν λαλῇ τὸ ψεῦδος,
44g ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων λαλεῖ,
44h ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν
44i καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ.
45a ἐγὼ δὲ ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω,
45b οὐ πιστεύετέ μοι.
46a τίς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐλέγχει με περὶ ἁμαρτίας;
46b εἰ ἀλήθειαν λέγω,
46c διὰ τί ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετέ μοι;
47a ὁ ὢν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ
47b τα ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούει·
47c διὰ τοῦτο ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἀκούετε,

47d ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστέ.
48a Ἀπεκρίθησαν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ·
48b οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἡμεῖς ὅτι
48c Σαμαρίτης εἶ σὺ
48d καὶ δαιμόνιον ἔχεις;
49a ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς·
49b ἐγὼ δαιμόνιον οὐκ ἔχω,
49c ἀλλὰ τιμῶ τὸν πατέρα μου,
49d καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀτιμάζετέ με.
50a ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ ζητῶ τὴν δόξαν μου·
50b ἔστιν ὁ ζητῶν καὶ κρίνων.
51a ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν,
51b ἐάν τις τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον τηρήσῃ,
51c θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.
52a εἶπον [οὖν] αὐτῷ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι·
52b νῦν ἐγνώκαμεν ὅτι δαιμόνιον ἔχεις.
52c Ἀβραὰμ ἀπέθανεν καὶ οἱ προφῆται,
52d καὶ σὺ λέγεις·
52e ἐάν τις τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσῃ,
52f οὐ μὴ γεύσηται θανάτου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.
53a μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ, ὅστις ἀπέθανεν;
53b καὶ οἱ προφῆται ἀπέθανον.
53c τίνα σεαυτὸν ποιεῖς;
54a ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς·
54b ἐὰν ἐγὼ δοξάσω ἐμαυτόν,
54c ἡ δόξα μου οὐδέν ἐστιν·
54d ἔστιν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με,
54e ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι
54f θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐστιν,
55a καὶ οὐκ ἐγνώκατε αὐτόν,
55b ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδα αὐτόν.

55c καὰν εἶπω ὅτι
55d οὐκ οἶδα αὐτόν,
55e ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης·
55f ἀλλὰ οἶδα αὐτὸν
55g καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ.
56a Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο
56b ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν,
56c καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη.
57a εἶπον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν·
57b πεντήκοντα ἔτη οὔπω ἔχεις
57c καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἑώρακας;
58a εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ἰησοῦς·
58b ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν,
58c πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί.
59a ἦραν οὖν λίθους ἵνα βάλωσιν ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν.
59b Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐκρύβη καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ.

31a JESUS then said to the Jews who had come to believe him:
31b If you remain in my word
31c you are truly my disciples
32a and you will know the truth
32b and the truth will make you free.
33a They answered him:
33b Seed of Abraham are we
33c and we have never been slaves to anybody;
33d how is it that you say:
33e You will become free?
34a Jesus answered them:
34b Amen amen I say to you:
34c Everybody who does sin
34d is a slave to sin.
35a The slave does not remain in the house forever,
35b the son remains forever.
36a If then the Son will make you free,
36b you will really be free.
37a I know that you are seed of Abraham,
37b but you seek to kill me,
37c because my word has no place in you.
38a I, of what I have seen with the father, I speak,
38b and you, what you have heard from the father, you do.
39a They answered and said to him:
39b Our father is Abraham.
39c Jesus said to them:
39d If you are children of Abraham,
39e the works of Abraham you would do;
40a now you seek to kill me,
40b a man who has spoken the truth to you
40c which he has heard from God;

40d this is not what Abraham did.
41a You do the works of your father.
41b They [then] said to him:
41c We were not born from fornication,
41d one father do we have, God.
42a Jesus said to them:
42b If God were your father,
42c you would love me,
42d for I, I have proceeded from God and came forth;
42e for I have not come from myself,
42f but He sent me.
43a Why do you not understand what I say?
43b because you cannot hear my word.
44a You are from the father the devil,
44b and you want to do your father's desires.
44c He was a murderer of man from the beginning
44d and did not stand in the truth,
44e because there is no truth in him.
44f When he speaks the lie,
44g he speaks from his own,
44h because he is a liar
44i and the father of it.
45a I, because I speak the truth,
45b you do not believe me.
46a Who of you convicts me of sin?
46b If I speak (the) truth,
46c why do you not believe me?
47a He who is from God
47b hears the words of God;
47c therefore you do not hear,
47d because you are not from God.
48a The Jews answered and said to him:

48b Do we not rightly say:
48c you are a Samaritan,
48d and you have a demon?
49a Jesus answered:
49b I have no demon,
49c but I honour my father,
49d and you dishonour me.
50a I do not seek my glory;
50b there is one who seeks and judges.
51a Amen amen, I say to you:
51b If anyone keeps my word,
51c he will not see death forever.
52a The Jews [then] said to him:
52b Now we know that you have a demon.
52c Abraham died, and the prophets,
52d and you say:
52e If anyone keeps my word,
52f he will not taste death forever.
53a Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?
53b and the prophets died.
53c Whom do you make of yourself?
54a Jesus answered:
54b If I glorify myself,
54c my glory is nothing;
54d it is my Father who glorifies me,
54e of whom you say:
54f our God is he,
55a and you do not know him,
55b I know him.
55c And if I said:
55d I do not know him,
55e then I would, be like you, a liar;

55f but I do know him.
55g and I keep his word.
56a Abraham your father rejoiced
56b that he was to see my day,
56c and he saw and was glad.
57a The Jews then said to him:
57b You are not yet fifty years (old)
57c and have you seen Abraham?
58a Jesus said to them:
58b Amen amen, I say to you,
58c before Abraham became I am.
59a They then took stones to throw at him.
59b Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple.

INTRODUCTION

'The New Testament writings were never presented as something entirely new. On the contrary, they attest their rootedness in the long religious experience of the people of Israel, an experience recorded in diverse forms in the sacred books which comprise the Jewish Scriptures. The New Testament recognises their divine authority. This recognition manifests itself in different ways, with different degrees of explicitness.'

This quotation from the 2001 document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission[2] reflects the current view in New Testament exegesis and biblical theology that in order to understand the New Testament, it is essential to understand the way its authors used and interpreted the Old Testament. Over the past decades, scholars have come to realize that the idiom of the New Testament authors, living in a Jewish world influenced by Graeco-Roman culture, is thoroughly marked by first century Jewish exegesis. The followers of Jesus reinterpreted the texts that were to become the Jewish Bible in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Their idiom was Jewish because it was the idiom of Jesus as well as of themselves. In other words, their belief in Jesus changed their understanding of the Jewish tradition, but at the same time this very tradition provided them with the means to express their changed understanding.

2 Pontifica Commissio Biblica, *Le peuple juif et ses Saintes Écritures dans la Bible chrétienne* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2001), 19. The English translation used here (*The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*) is taken from the Holy See's website: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html, section I.A (3). A revised English translation of this document is to be found on http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/pbc_2001.htm.

When we speak of 'the theological idiom of first century Judaism' we must realize that we are dealing with various currents of thought and practice, and a variety of literary sources, genres, and even languages. In the past decades the awareness of the heterogeneity of first century Judaism has grown, as a result of the discovery of the texts from Qumran and the publication of several Targumim, and the critical study of the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Hellenistic Jewish literature and early rabbinical literature—Mishna, Talmud, and early Midrashim. Intensive study of these texts has enlarged and intensified our knowledge of early Jewish exegesis, which has resulted in numerous publications about the Old Testament and the early Jewish background of the New Testament. The New Testament exegesis of the Old Testament is no longer regarded as a complete novelty, but as a way of interpreting that is rooted in first century Judaism, using Jewish theological motifs and exegetical methods. The fundamental difference between the Christian Jewish and non-Christian Jewish interpretation of the Bible of this period is one of perspective, not of methods. These different perspectives caused Christian and non-Christian Jews to drift apart. Gradually Christian exegesis became estranged from its Jewish origins, and the Pharisaic-rabbinical interpretation, rooting in the Second Temple Period and expressed in the Mishna, Talmud, and Midrashim, became the exclusive domain of Judaism.[3] The destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E and the increasing influx of Gentiles into the Christian communities accelerated and intensified the process of estrangement. Christianity and Pharisaic-rabbinical Judaism became separate communities with their own focuses on the Old Testament.

3 So *The Jewish People*, I.C-D.

The Johannine problem

The present study must be situated within today's interest in the Jewish background of the Fourth Gospel. Among the New Testament writings, the Gospel of John has a particular place. One of its most striking particularities is the discrepancy between its use of Jewish exegetical methods and theological language and its obviously anti-Jewish utterances. The problem is that in John, Jewish concepts and traditions frequently serve to formulate apparently anti-Jewish arguments (e.g., John 5, 41–47; 8,23). Our formulation of the problem is deliberately cautious; scholars like R.A. Culpepper,[4] A. Reinhartz[5] and P.J. Tomson[6] would probably prefer to drop the adverb 'apparently' and argue that many Johannine sayings and concepts not only *appear* anti-Jewish, but *are* so in their very essence. In their view, John's uncompromising christology goes hand in hand with theological anti-Judaism. Scholars like J.L. Martyn[7] and K. Wengst[8] on the other hand, explain John's anti-Jewish features as consequences of historical circumstances and emphasize that they reflect the struggle between Pharisaic Judaism and Jewish Christianity. This struggle took place during a critical period in Jewish and early Christian history: neither Christian nor Pharisaic-

4 Culpepper, 'Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters', *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel. Papers of the Leuven Colloquium, 2000* (Jewish and Christian Heritage Series, 1; ed. R. Bieringer a.o.; Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2001) 68–91.

5 Reinhartz, '"Jews" and Jews in the Fourth Gospel', *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel,* 341–356.

6 Tomson, 'The "Jews"' in the Gospel of John as Compared with the Palestinian Talmud and the Synoptic Gospels', *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel,* 301–340.

7 Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdom, ^{2}1979 [–^{1}1968]).

8 Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus. Der historische Ort des Johannesevangeliums als Schlüssel zu seiner Interpretation* (Biblisch Theologische Studien 5; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1981); reprinted as *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus. Ein Versuch über das Johannesevangelium* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1990).

rabbinical self-definitions were crystallized; many Christian communities were still predominantly Jewish and would remain so for the decades to come, while Pharisaic Judaism still tried to find its place after the disaster of the Jewish War of 66–70 C.E. The anti-Jewish texts in the New Testament reflect the conflicts that arose between both groups exactly because of their closeness and their respective internal turmoil, rather than their distance and self-confident reliance on a fixed identity. However, since New Testament writings do not express the same degree of closeness and sympathy – or antipathy – to Judaism or to specific Jewish groups, scholars tend to perceive an underlying pattern of growing early Christian anti-Judaism, a gliding scale from what J.S. Siker calls 'inclusion' to 'exclusion', starting with the Pauline Letters and culminating into the Gospel of John.[9] On the basis of the critical analysis of individual New Testament writings, some scholars have also sought to describe how anti-Jewish arguments developed in the communities to which these writings were addressed. R.E. Brown[10] and Martyn[11] for instance have both developed a theory about the genesis of Johannine christology which regards anti-Jewish arguments in the Fourth Gospel as a response to the growing tensions between early Christian and Jewish communities.

9 See e.g. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews. Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991); Tomson, 'Als dit uit de Hemel is...' *Jezus en de schrijvers van het Nieuwe Testament in hun verhouding tot het Jodendom* (Hilversum: B. Folkertsma Stichting voor Talmudica, 1997).

10 Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

11 Martyn, *History and Theology*.

John 8,31–59 as an example

Most studies about the Jewish background of John have a relatively broad scope. Additional in-depth study of those passages in John where the ambiguity of Jewishness and anti-Judaism is particularly prominent is a sine qua non for a more profound understanding of the problem sketched above. John 8,31–59 is an obvious subject for such investigation, since it is generally considered the very pivot of John's anti-Jewish arguments, but at the same time relies on Jewish traditions and exegesis. The protagonists in John 8,31–59 are Jesus and a group of opponents described as 'the Jews who had come to believe him'. The discussion is about the interpretation of the Old Testament: What does fatherhood of Abraham mean? How is it interpreted by Jesus and by his partners in discussion? What does it mean to have God as a father? In the course of the debate the evangelist makes Jesus say to his opponents that they are neither children of Abraham nor children of God but that the devil is their father; that he himself is greater than Abraham; that Abraham rejoiced in seeing his day, and that he is before Abraham became (8,37–44.52–58). The opponents on the other hand argue that they are free men because of their descent from Abraham, and see themselves as Abraham's true offspring and as God's children. What we have here is a debate about the interpretation of the Old Testament which at the same time is a debate about self-definition and understanding of the other.

The discussion starts with an admonition of Jesus to his new disciples ('the Jews who had come to believe him') to believe in him. His explanation of what it means to be his disciple fuels a debate marked by misinterpretations and animosity. They immediately start questioning his teaching ('We are seed of Abraham...?' (*v* 33), whereupon he turns their objection ('I know you are seed of Abraham' (*v* 37) into arguments in favour of himself and into accusations against them ('I speak of what I have seen with my father and you do what you have heard from your father' (*v* 38). Jesus suggests that his opponents are children

of the devil (*v*44), whereupon they accuse him of being a Samaritan and being possessed by a demon (*v*48). In *v*59 the debate ends up in an attempt to assault Jesus physically. The estrangement between the two parties becomes most tangible in *v*48. Samaritan and the Jews (*v*48) are obviously meant as discrediting outsider terms. The historical and religious animosity between Jews and Samaritans explains the pejorative and alienating use of the word Samaritan—see for parallels e.g. Mt 10,5; Luke 9,52–53; John 4,9. Much more problematic is the fact that John appears to use the term the Jews in the same way. This obviously alienating use of the Jews is a puzzling and much debated aspect of Johannine anti-Judaism.

Nowadays, the general opinion in New Testament scholarship is that in one way or another John 8,31–59 reflects actual discussions between the Johannine community and its Jewish environment at the end of the first century C.E. The topic of the debate is the most important indication of its original setting. The conspicuous and rather sudden appearance of Abraham in John 8,31–59, and the role he plays there may be important indications of the historical context of the debate. However, in order to understand and appreciate the way John pictures Abraham it is crucial to understand how Abraham was seen in contemporary Judaism.

Abraham is a central figure in the Old Testament. He is the ancestor of the Jews, the man with whom God made his covenant, without whom neither the Jewish people nor the covenant between them and God would even exist. Because of his fundamental role as patriarch and partner in God's covenant, Abraham also figures frequently in post-biblical stories, legal prescripts and prayers. Throughout Jewish history, especially in periods of hardship, Abraham has been a symbol of hope, a person to identify with. This certainly was the case during the upheavals in the Jewish world in the first century C.E. Moreover, because of his theological importance, the emerging Christian communities 'reinvented' Abraham as a person with whom they could

identify as well. Paul's definition of Abraham as the father of all believers in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 is a clear example of such a Christian reinterpretation. In John 8,31–59 we find another example, one of a much more polemic nature.

Purpose and procedure

The purpose of this study is to define the significance of Abraham in John 8.31–59, when we read this passage as a reflection of the discussion between a group of (Jewish) Christians and a group of Jews at the end of the first century C.E. We shall start with a detailed analysis of the text itself. In chapter 1 we shall investigate whether the proposed pericope, John 8,31–59, is indeed a linguistic unit, a meaningful whole, distinct from its context. Therefore we need to determine whether the proposed demarcation is correct and describe how the pericope is embedded in its context. A particular, almost classic problem is the relation between John 8,30 and 8,31. After having delimited our text, we shall analyse its structure: the pattern of the debate between Jesus and his opponents, the construction of its various arguments. This structural analysis will give us insight into the way the evangelist composed his text, and will provide us with indications of the stratification of the text— if indeed the text consists of several layers. Chapter 2 will extend the results of the previous chapter by analysing the text by two methods, narrative criticism and literary criticism. We shall begin with a close reading of the text, starting from the structural framework detected earlier. For the literary critical approach that is to follow we shall turn to the ground-breaking commentaries on John by J. Wellhausen[12] and R. Bultmann.[13] Both Wellhausen and Bultmann regarded John 8,31–59 as an amalgam of

12 Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Johannis* (Berlin: Georg Reim, 1908).

13 Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (13th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953).

fragments, and sought to reconstruct what they considered to be the original text. Although their methods have not always stood the tests of time and criticism, they have been so influential that their commentaries should not be disregarded. Moreover, literary criticism and redaction criticism are still valuable instruments of biblical scholarship, although nowadays they are generally used with less aplomb and more restrictions than Bultmann considered necessary. A more recent example of literary criticism is the theory developed by M.-É. Boismard and A. Lamouille,[14] partly based on stylistic evidence. We shall discuss their analysis of John 8,31–59 as well.

When focusing more specifically on Abraham, we find that one of the striking features of John's depiction of Abraham in 8,31–59 is its variety. Having noticed this, the question to ask is what this variety means: does it result from the genesis of the text as an amalgamation of different sources, or is it the consequence of John's own creative use of images of Abraham that were current in his days? After the structural analysis and close reading of John 8,31–59 in chapter 1 and 2 of this study, it will prove possible to answer the first part of the question in the negative. In order to answer the second question, we must find out how John 8,31–59 relates to other texts about Abraham. Therefore, the purpose of chapter 3 and 4 is to situate the Johannine depiction of Abraham within the entire 'Abrahamology' of first century Judaism and early Christianity, and see if and how the Johannine imagery of Abraham relates to extant literary and theological traditions. In chapter 3 we shall examine texts about Abraham that provide parallels to John. In chapter 4 we shall reconsider John's depiction of Abraham, as analysed in chapter 2, in the light of the texts described in chapter 3 and decide, if possible, what is originally Johannine and what is not, and to what extent John depends on or echoes earlier and contemporaneous traditions.

14 Boismard and Lamouille, *L'Évangile de Jean* (Synopse des quatre évangiles en français, tome III; Paris: Cerf, 1977).

In chapter 5 the conflict of John 8,31–59 and the role of Abraham will be situated within the historical conflict between the Johannine community and its Jewish environment. While in chapters 1–4 we have been concentrating on defining the role of Abraham within John itself and in relation to other texts, in chapter 5 we shall take John as point of departure for a view into history. Which role does the polemic of John 8,31–59 play within the conflict between the Johannine community and its Jewish environment, and what does it tell us about the Johannine community and its opponents? As to the issue of the relation between the text and theology of John, and the historical and social conditions which helped in creating it, the publications by Martyn have been an important stimulus. Although some aspects of his theory have rightly met with criticism, his method of reading John as a two level drama has proven fruitful for the understanding of John in relation to its background. We shall therefore discuss Martyn's interpretation of John 8,31–59, especially since he describes this pericope in detail. Other publications in the field of historical criticism, such as those by W. Meeks[15] and J.D.G. Dunn[16], will help to complement and refine Martyn's picture of the historical setting of John. Finally, in chapter 6 we shall give a summary of the results of this study.

15 Meeks, 'Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities', *'To See Ourselves as Others See Us'. Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (ed. J. Neusner and E.S. Frerichs; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985) 93–115.

16 Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianitly and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christinanity* (London/Philadelphia; SCM Press/ Trinity Press, 1991).

I

THE LIMITS & STRUCTURE OF JOHN 8,31–59

John 8,31–59 is a distinct scene within an episode, John 7,1–10,21,[17] set in Jerusalem during the feast of Tabernacles. John 7,1–10,21 consists of a series of debates between Jesus and a group of people who are alternately designated as 'the crowd' or 'the crowds', 'the Jews', 'the Pharisees', 'the chief priests and the Pharisees', and 'some of the people of Jerusalem'.[18] The way in which our pericope is embedded in this context shall be discussed in another chapter. In the present chapter the structure of John 8,31–59 is the principal topic. Before we turn to an analysis of the structure of this passage, we will define its limits, paying particular attention to the almost classical problem of the relation between *v*30 andd v31.

As to the method followed in this chapter, it is important to note that structural analysis of a text is not a goal in itself, and certainly not so in the present study. It is a methodological tool that helps us to get a first grip on a text, to provide us with a basis for exploring its arguments and theology. In other words, the present chapter of this study is only meant as a first step towards the final goal, which is to understand how Abraham functions within John 8,31–59, when we read this text as a discussion between different religious groups. Because the emphasis is on the investigation of the tradition-historical setting of our pericope, we have chosen not to give extensive methodological expositions,

17 Cf. L. Schenke, 'Joh 7–10: Eine dramatische Szene', *ZNW* 80 (1989) 173–183.

18 See for 'the crowd': 7,12.20.31.40.43 cf. 32.49; 'the crowds': 7,12; 'the Jews': 7,11.13.15.35; 8,22.31.48.52.57; 10,19; cf. 9,18.22; 'the Pharisees': 7,32.47.48; 8,13; 9,40; cf. 9,13.15.16: 'the chief priests and the Pharisees': 7,32.45; 'some of the people of Jerusalem': 7,25.

including expositions about structural analysis as a method.[19] On the other hand, a brief explanation of the steps taken in the present chapter must be given. What we have done is the following.

We first defined the limits of a text, on the basis of changes of persons, motifs, time and/or place, and introductory remarks and conclusions. John 8,59 is the indisputable end of our pericope, but its beginning is more difficult to define; see section 1 below. After having demarcated our text, we defined the sequences within the text, on the basis of motifs, repetition of words and phrases, and structural patterns such as chiasm and parallelism. However, various data allowed different and not always corresponding patterns. For instance, there is an obvious caesura between *vv* 31–47 and *vv* 48–58. But within these two parts, one may discern different patterns; which pattern one distinguishes depends on the criteria chosen. The motifs of the text suggest a caesura between *v* 37 and *v* 38, whereas the more formal argument of change of persons suggests a caesura between *v* 38 and *v* 39. In this case, in order to get a better insight into John's reasoning with regard to Abraham, we have given preference to the thematic criterion over the formal criterion.

Apart from this, we are aware that the result of this first step, i.e. the definition of the limits of the text, will influence the outcome of the structural analysis. We have analysed John 8,31–59 as a separate unit and obtained certain results, but would undoubtedly have discovered other patterns within the same pericope, had we chosen to analyse the immediate context as well, e.g. John 8,12–59 or 7,1–8,59. Therefore, we like to emphasize that what we shall present here is a proposal for a

19 About structural analysis as a method in the exegesis of the New Testament, see W. Weren, *Vensters op Jezus. Methoden in de uitleg van de evangeliën* (Zoetermeer: Meinema ^{2}1999 [=^{1}1998]) 19–42); D. Patte, *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); for Old Testament exegesis in general e.g. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (2 vols.; Studia Semitica Neerlandica 20; Assen: Van Gorcum 1981).

structure. Moreover, we like to emphasize that the proposed structure results from our own analysis, and does not rely on the analyses by others. This does not mean we have ignored the latter: in commentaries and monographs on John one naturally finds a subdivision of the text commented upon, but arguments for this subdivision are generally sparse or even absent. We did consult the article 'Jesus the Judge: Forensic Process in John 8, 21–59'[20] by J.H. Neyrey, which is a valuable check on our own work, even if Neyrey's results do not always correspond with our own.[21] In the analysis of John 8, 31–59 in section 2, we will refer to Neyrey in notes.

1.1. The limits of John 8.31–59

It is evident and undebated that 8,59 forms the conclusion of our pericope: the main character leaves the scene and in 9,1 we start with a new action and with new protagonists. With regard to the beginning of our pericope, however, there is no consensus. Some scholars lay the caesura between our pericope and the previous one before 8,30[22] others lay the caesura between 8,30 and 8,31[23] One of the problems in

20 Neyrey, 'Jesus the Judge: Forensic Process in John 8,21–59', http://www.nd.edu/~jneyreyl/forensic.html, 23 pages; originally published as 'Jesus the Judge: Forensic Process in John 8,21–59', *Bib* 68 (1987) 509–541. We will refer to the pages of the article on internet.

21 The difference is partly due to the fact that Neyrey analyses John 8,12–20 as well, and that he analyses the text as a forensic process comprising of a number of steps. The Roman judicial process we know form the trial of Jesus distinguishes the following stages: 1. arrest; 2. charges; 3. cognition; 4. verdict; 5. sentence; 6. judicial warning ('Jesus the Judge', 1).

22 See for instance R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* (4 vols.; HTKNT 4; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1965–1984), II. (2nd ed.; 1977), 258–259.

23 See for instance Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols.; The Anchor Bible 29–29a; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966–1970), I. 354-355.361, and J. Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (2 vols.; ÖKTNT 4; Gütersloh/Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlag Mohn/Echter Verlag, 1979–1981), I. 297–298.

these verses is that both 8,30 and 8,31 refer to people who believe in Jesus. According to Brown, this double reference is due to the pre-history of the text: the editor inserted *v* 30 in order to break up the long discourse of 8,12–59[24] and by consequence the dialogue that followed (8,31b–58) required an introduction. Another person, perhaps the final redactor, added v 31a and made the audience of v 30 into the audience of v 31 as well. However, Brown's proposal has several drawbacks. The first one is that by omitting *vv* 30–31a he breaks the cohesion of John 8,12–59; the second one is that the discussion in 8,31b–58, which is fundamentally about belief in Jesus, cannot be fully understood without v 31a, which says that the people whom Jesus addresses believe in him. But even if we do not follow Brown and assume that vv 30–31 are an integral part of the text, the problem remains that Jesus' audience is mentioned in ***both*** verses. The most plausible interpretation is that 'as he spoke thus' (*v* 30a) refers to the words of Jesus in 8,12–29, that the phrase 'many came to believe in him' (*v* 30b) is the conclusion of this passage, and that 8,31 introduces a new debate with a new theme. The subject matter of the debate changes, not the audience, and the repeated reference to their belief should be seen as a consequence of this shift of motifs. Because of his words in *vv* 12–29, part of the audience came to believe in Jesus, and precisely this belief is tested by his admonition in *vv* 31–32. We shall elaborate this point in chapter 2 of this study.

24 Brown, *John*, I. 354–355. According to Brown, this redactor saw no problem in describing them as οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, because there was a strain in the Johannine material or its redaction in which this term simply described the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judaea, and did not necessarily refer to authorities hostile to Jesus. We shall treat the problem of the Johannine Jews in chapter 5 of this study.

1.2. *The structure of John 8.31–59: a proposal*

John 8.31–59 consists of a long dialogue (*vv* 31–58) which starts with an (re)introduction of the main characters (v 31a) and ends with a narrative conclusion (*v* 59). Within the pericope one notices a number of shifts from one speaker to another and from one issue to another. Scholars have based their different, sometimes conflicting, proposals regarding the structure of John 8.31–59 on these shifts. Schnackenburg[25] for instance proposes a subdivision into 8,30–36; 37–47; 48–59, whereas Brown[26] distinguishes *vv* 31–41a; 41b–47; 48–59. Other options are e.g. to split up John 8,31–59 into *vv* 31–36; 37–45; 46–59 (E.C. Hoskyns)[27] or *vv* 31–39b; 39c–48; 49–59 (Becker).[28] All these proposals have in common that they break up the thematic consistency of the pericope and interrupt its arguments. M.-J. Lagrange's suggestion to divide the pericope into two parts, 8.31–47 and 48–59,[29] has the advantage of leaving the thematic consistency intact. Lagrange argues that *vv* 31–47 are characterized by a defensive attitude on part of the Jews, contrarily to *vv* 48–59, where they attack Jesus. To Lagrange's argument we would like to add the following observations:[30]

1. Verses 31–47 deals with the question of the identity of Jesus' opponents, while in vv 48–58 the discussion focuses on the identity of Jesus;
2. Since the subject matter of the discussion in vv 31–47 is different from the subject matter in *vv* 48–58, a number of key words occur either in *vv* 31–47 or in *vv* 48–58(59). These key words may be

25 Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, II. 258.281.291–292.

26 Brown, *John*, I. 361.

27 Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. F.N. Davey; London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 337.340.344.

28 Becker, *Johannes*, I. 301.304.309.

29 Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (Études Bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1925), 240–241.

30 Note that Neyrey does not see John 8,31–59 as a diptych divided into subsections, but as a sequence of five sections: *vv* 31–37; 38–40; 41–47; 48–55; 56–59.

found at the beginning of part one or part two, in the middle or at the end; in some cases they play a role throughout both vv 31–47 and vv 48–58. In the following list of key words we have put corresponding terms beside each other:

Part One	*Part Two*
πιστεύω (vv 31, 45, 46)	
ἀλήθεια (*vv* 32, 32, 40, 44, 44, 45, 46)	
λόγος (of Jesus), combined with verbs τηρέω that have the connotation 'to remain' i.e. μένω and χωρέω (*vv* 31.37), or combined with the verb ἀκούω (*v* 43) ἐλεύθερος/ἐλευθερόω (*vv* 33, 36/32, 36)	λόγος (of Jesus) combined with the verb τηρέω (vv 51.52.55)
σπέρμα ᾽Αβραάμ (vv 33.37)	
τέκνα τοῦ ᾽Αβραάμ (*v* 39)	
δουλεύω/δοῦλος (*vv* 34.35/33)	
ἁμαρτία (*vv* 34, 34, 46)	
υἱός (*vv* 35, 36)	
ἀποκτείνω (*vv* 37, 40)	ἀποθνήσκω (*vv* 52.53)
ἀνθρωποκτόνος (*v* 44)	θάνατος (*vv* 51.52)
ἀκούω (*vv* 38.40.43.47.47)	δαιμόνιον (vv 48, 49, 52)
διάβολος (*v* 44)	δόξα / δοξάζω (vv 50.54/54.54); in the same word field τιμάω and ἀτιμάζω (v 49)
	προφῆτα (vv 52.53)

3. The following additional literary indications underline that *vv* 31–47 and 48–59 form a diptych: Jesus' interlocutors are introduced twice, once in *v* 31 (τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῳ Ἰουδαίους), once at the beginning of part two, in *v* 48 (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι); they quote Jesus twice, once in the first part of the pericope (*v* 33; cf. *v* 32), again in the second part of the pericope (*v* 52; cf. *v* 51). The panels of the diptych are not exact parallels. The discussion in *vv* 31–47 consists of three arguments, whereas *vv* 48–59 has only one argument (i.e., one reasoning or a series of reasonings in support of or opposing to a particular issue). In outline, all arguments proceed as follows:

a) The debate starts or takes another turn by means of a statement (saying, question). This statement (saying, question) evokes a reaction, such as a question, an objection or a word of approval.

b) The reaction (question, objection, word of approval) marks the beginning of a debate or discourse which focuses on the original statement (*a*). In the course of the debate/discourse subordinate or related themes and thus new key words occur.

c) The argument ends or is interrupted with a statement or saying referring to the initial statement (*a*), but not identical with it. In most cases the conclusion elicits a new problem.

31 Neyrey uses the forensic term 'test' for what we call 'argument'; like our 'argument' his 'test' consists of three elements: statement, misunderstanding and explanation ('Jesus the Judge', 6).

32 Culpepper, ('The Pivot of John's Prologue', *NTS* 27 [1980–81] 1–31, p. 27) has pointed out the chiastic structure of *vv* 31–37, but does not consider *v* 32, which is also about freedom.

A 31b if you remain in my word etc.
B 33a we are seed of Abraham
C 33b you will become free
D 34 anyone who commits sin etc.
E 35a the slave does not remain
E' 35b the son remains
D' 36a if the Son makes you free (*note continued on next page*)

In the sections below we shall describe the arguments of *vv* 31–47 and *vv* 48–59. Before each description, we shall sketch the basic structure of the argument in question, which will serve as a guide to the more detailed exposition of the structure that follows. Within the marked boundaries, the text of the pericope will be rendered in an abbreviated form or be paraphrased, unless complete rendering is required.

1.2.1. *Part one, John 8.31–47: Who are* οἱ πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους

The pericope starts with the introduction of the participants in the debate, Jesus and 'the Jews who had come to believe him' (v 31a); in vv 32–47 the Jews are referred to as 'they' or 'them' without further specification. The main subject of discussion is the identity of Jesus' opponents.

1.2.1.1. *First argument*: freedom and slavery (*vv* 31–37)[32]

According to Jesus, one will really be free if one remains in his word. According to the believing Jews, being seed of Abraham implies freedom; how can Jesus suggest that they are not free yet? Jesus argues that they cannot be free unless the Son makes them free; he

C' 36b you will really be free
B' 37a you are seed of Abraham
A' 37b my word has no place in you.

Neyrey's proposal ('Jesus the Judge', 520) is:

A 31b if you ***remain in my word***
B 32b you will know the truth... set you ***free***
C 33a we are the ***seed of Abraham***
D 33b we have never been ***slaves***
D' 34–35 ***slave to sin***: the slave does not remain, the son remains
C' 37a I know that you are ***seed of Abraham***
B' 37b if the Son makes you ***free***, you will be truly free
A' 37c ***my word finds no place*** in you

says that they are seed of Abraham, but nevertheless intend to kill him.

1.2.1.2. *Second argument*: to be children of Abraham (*vv* 38–41a)
The Jews say they have Abraham as a father. Jesus argues that to be children of Abraham means to do the works of Abraham. The Jews cannot be Abraham's children, since they intend to kill the man who spoke the truth, something Abraham would never have done.

1.2.1.3. *Third argument*: God or the diabolos as the father of the Jews (*vv* 41b–47)
The Jews say that God is their only father. Jesus retorts that God cannot be their father. The diabolos is their father, since they wish to kill Jesus. They belong to the one who does not speak the truth, but lies. They do not believe Jesus, because he represents the truth.

1.2.1.1. Part one, first argument: freedom and slavery (vv31–37)

*v*31 INTRODUCTION TO THE DIALOGUE

*v*31–32 [*a*] OPENING

JESUS
if ***you*** remain IN ***my word***
you are truly my disciples
and you will know the TRUTH
and the TRUTH will make you FREE

*vv*33–37 [*b*] REACTION AND DISCUSSION

*v*33 THE JEWS
[1] seed of Abraham are we
[2] and we have never been ***slaves*** to anybody
[so] how is it that you say: You will become FREE?

*vv*34–37: JESUS
[2'] ***slave*** = slave under sin
the slave versus the son (= *Bildwort*)
if then the Son will make you FREE
you will really be FREE (= application of *Bildwort*,
reinterpretation of *v*32b + answer to *v*33c)
[1'] you are seed of Abraham
but you seek to kill me

*v*37 [c] CONCLUSION

because ***my word*** has no place IN ***you***

Vv 31–32, OPENING OF THE DEBATE [a]:
The debate starts with a saying of Jesus, addressed to 'the Jews who had come to believe him', about true discipleship in relation to freedom (*vv*31–32):

*v*31 If you remain in my word
you are truly my disciples
*v*32 and you will know the truth and the truth ***will make you free.***

Vv 33–37b REACTION AND DISCUSSION [b]:
The Jews answer that they are seed of Abraham [seed of Abraham=1] and have never been slaves [slavery=2]; how can Jesus say that they will ***become*** free?

*v*33 Seed of Abraham are we [1]
we have never been slaves to anybody [2]
how is it that you say:
you will become free?

*v*33 is an answer to *vv*31b–32: in *v*31b Jesus said that they are (ἐστέ: 'you are') his true disciples if they remain in his word, in *v*33b they say that they are (ἐσμέν: 'we are') seed of Abraham. Freedom (*v*32b) is explained as freedom from slavery (*v*33c).

Ἐλεύθεροι γενήσεσθε (*v*33d) is in contrast with σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐσμεν (*v*33b): the Jews suggest that, being seed of Abraham, they cannot be slaves and therefore need not ***become*** free. In *v*34 Jesus uses their argument about slavery on behalf of his own reasoning, which has the form of an amen-saying:

*v*34 Amen amen I say to you
every one who commits sin
is a ***slave*** of sin. [2]

In what C.H. Dodd has called the ***short parable***[33] of *v* 35 'the son' is the antipode of 'the slave'.

> *v* 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever,
> the son remains forever.

Vv 34–35 brings the discussion on another, more remote level; *v* 36 takes it back again to the actual debate by the application of saying and parable to the present situation:

> *V* 36 If then the Son will make you free
> ***you will really be free.***

V 36 reinterprets both *v* 32b and *v* 33c: the Son (*v* 36a) takes over the function of the truth (*v* 32b), becoming free (*v* 33c) means becoming free through the Son (*v* 36b). The entire reasoning in *vv* 34–36 about 'son' and 'slave' is:

V 34	Anyone who commits sin	***sin***	
	is a slave (δοῦλός ἐστιν) of sin	***sin***/SLAVE + εἰμι	A
v 35	the slave does not remain	SLAVE + μένω	B
	the son remains	SON + μένω	B
v 36	if the Son makes you ***free***	SON/***free***	
	you will really be ***free*** (ἐλεύθεροι ἔσεσθε)	***free*** + εἰμι	A

V 37a refers to the first part [1] of the objection by the Jews (*v* 33b):

> I know you are seed of Abraham.

The Jews reason that being seed of Abraham implies freedom from sla-

33 Dodd, ***Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 379.

very, Jesus regards freedom as freedom from slavery under sin (*v* 34cd). The tension between being 'seed of Abraham' and the desire of the Jews to kill Jesus is expressed in the word ἀλλά, 'but' ('but you seek to kill me', *v* 37b).

V 37c, CONCLUSION [*c*]:
The allusion to the initial saying of *v* 31 ('if you [ὑμεῖς] remain IN my word') in *v* 37c makes it clear that the opponents of Jesus cannot attain real freedom, for they are unable to be his true disciples: because my word has no place IN *you* (ὑμῖν).

1.2.1.2. *Part one, second argument: Abraham as the father of* οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῳ Ἰουδαῖοι (*vv* 38–41a)[34]

V 38 [*a*] OPENING
JESUS I, of what I have seen with the FATHER I speak
(= father X)
and you, what you heard from the FATHER you *do*
(= father Y)

34 According to Neyrey ('Jesus the Judge', 8), the second sequence runs *vv* 38–40 and has the form of a chiasm (translation and division in verses by Neyrey):
A. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father (*v* 38)
B. They answered him: '*Abraham* is our *father*' (*v* 39a)
B' Jesus said to them: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God' (*vv* 39b–40)
A'. "This is not what Abraham did" (*v* 40c)
Neyrey bases the chiastic structure on the issue of 'doing', either doing what 'your father told you' or doing what Abraham did. We prefer to lay the caesura at *v* 41b for two reasons: a) the Jews start speaking again, and b) *v* 41b introduces the theme of 'stemming from' and 'being from' (γεννᾶσθαι ἐκ and εἰμί ἐκ).

vv 39–40 [*b*] REACTION AND DISCUSSION

v 39ab: THE JEWS
our FATHER is Abraham (interpretation of *v* 38b:
Abraham = father Y)

vv 39c–40: JESUS
being children of Abraham
means ***doing*** the ***works*** of Abraham
now you seek to kill me
a man who told the truth which
he heard from God (suggests that God = father X)
this is not what Abraham ***did*** (Abraham ≠ father Y)

v 41 [*c*] CONCLUSION
you ***do the works*** of your FATHER (= father Y; who is father Y?)

V 38, OPENING OF THE DEBATE [*a*]:
The second argument, which results from the tension between the opponents being 'seed of Abraham' and their desire to kill Jesus, is marked by the word 'father'. The position of Jesus is in contrast with the position of the Jews: Jesus 'sees' and 'speaks', whereas the Jews 'hear' and 'do'.

I, of what I have seen with the FATHER, I speak
and you, what you heard from the FATHER, you do.

Vv 39–40, OBJECTION AND DISCUSSION [*b*]:
The Jews try to identify their hitherto unmentioned father: 'Abraham is our father' (*v* 39b). Jesus subsequently explains what it means to be Abraham's children (*v* 39de):

If you are children of Abraham,
you would ***do*** the works of Abraham.

*V*40 shows that the Jews cannot be children of Abraham, since they do not meet the condition that has been set forth in *v*39de, i.e. doing what Abraham did. In *v*40c God is mentioned as the source of the truth spoken by Jesus:

*V*40 Now you seek to kill me
a man who has spoken (λελάληκα) the truth to you
which he heard from God;
this is not what Abraham ***did***.

*V*40 is a key verse within *vv*31–47: because of the use of key words like ζητέω and ἀποκτείνω (cf. *v*37b) and ἀλήθεια (cf. *v*32) it links the second argument (*vv*38–41a) to the first argument (*vv*31–37); moreover, the remark about the 'truth' revealed by Jesus (*v*40bc) forms a bridge from *v*32 to *vv*44–46, where the same theme occurs. Finally, it should be noted that the pattern of reasoning in *vv*38–40 is the same as in *vv*33–37: both discussions begin by setting out the conditions for being disciples/children of Abraham and end by revealing that the Jews do not meet these conditions because of their desire to kill Jesus.

*V*41a, CONCLUSION [*c*]:
Although the discourse of *vv*38–40 has not led to a positive identification of the father of the Jews, *v*41a suggests that Abraham at least cannot be their father (cf. *v*39c); it further suggests that the father of the Jews must be someone who puts his children up to murder (cf. *v*40a).

*v*39c The works of ***Abraham*** would you do
*v*41a you ***do*** the works of your ***father***

The key words from *vv*38–39 that recur in *v*41a ('you' +'do' + 'father', *v*38b; 'the works', *v*39c) suggest a provisional answer to the problem of identity.

1.2.1.3. Part one, third argument: God as the father of οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι (*vv* 41b–47)

V 41b–d [*a*] OPENING

THE JEWS
we are not born ***from*** fornication — theme α: *fatherhood*
one FATHER do we have, God

vv 42–46 [*b*] REACTION, MONOLOGUE

JESUS
If God were your FATHER
you would love me — (God cannot be their father)
for I, I have proceeded ***from*** God
why do you not understand *what I say*? theme β: *word / speech*

You are ***from*** your FATHER the devil (…) — α
when he *speaks*, he *speaks* like his nature — β
for he is the FATHER of the lie — α
Because I *speak* the truth — β
you do not believe me (…)
If I *speak* the truth,
why don't you believe me?

v 47 [*c*] CONCLUSION

He who is ***from*** God — α
hears the *word* of God — β
you cannot hear
because you are not ***from*** God — α

V 41b-d, OPENING OF THE DEBATE [*a*]:
The argument of *vv* 41b–47 continues the discussion about fatherhood, now in relation to God. It starts from the suggestion in *v* 41a; *v* 41cd is an immediate reaction to *v* 41a:

*V*41c We were not born from fornication (ἐκ πορνείας)
one father we have, God.

The question of identity will further be discussed in terms of 'stemming from', 'originating from'.

*Vv*42–46, REACTION, MONOLOGUE [*b*]:
After *v*41bc the dialogue turns into a monologue. The claims of the Jews (*v*41de) are submitted to the test.

*V*42bc is similar in structure to *v*39de:

*V*39d *If* you are children of Abraham
*V*39e the work of Abraham you would do.

*V*42b *If* God were your father
*v*42c you would love me.

The reason for loving Jesus is given in *v*42d-g:

> For I, I have proceeded from God and came forth;
> For I did not come from myself,
> but He sent me.

'I proceeded from (ἐκ)' is Jesus' response to *v*41c ('we were not born from [ἐκ]'), while 'if God were your father' takes up *v*41d ('we have one father, God'). Jesus repeats that he comes from God and the Jews do not (cf. *v*40bc). He then turns again to the question of the identity of their father, which culminates into *v*44 saying that the ***diabolos*** is their father. The latter statement is surrounded by a framework (*vv*43.45–46) that begins and ends with the question why (διὰ τί) the Jews do not accept what Jesus says (*vv*43a.46c). Their refusal to accept what he says is first explained as lack of understanding (*v*43):

V 43a	Why is it that *my speech* | ***you do not understand?***[35]	A	B
	because ***you cannot hear*** | *my word*,	B	A

and in *vv* 45–46 as a lack of belief:

V 45a	I, because *I speak* the truth,	A	
	you do not believe me		B
v 46a	Who of you convicts me of sin?		
	If I *speak* (the) truth,	A	
	why do you not believe me?		B

Both *v* 43 and *vv* 45–46 contain a noun or verb that has to do with speech (λαλιάν and λόγον/λέγω), and one or more verbs that suggesting a favourable reception of this speech (γινώσκω/ἀκούω/πιστεύω. While *v* 43 is vague about the object of speech, in *vv* 45–46 Jesus' speech is associated with truth (cf. *v* 32 and *vv* 36.40). *V* 46a is at the centre of *vv* 45–46:

Who of you convicts me of sin?

The focal point of *vv* 43–46 is the accusation that the Jews have the devil as their father (*v* 44a) and that they are prepared to do as he desires (*v* 44b):

You are	from the father the devil
and you want to do	your father's desires.

In *v* 44 the duality between identity and actual deeds recurs (cf. *vv* 39de and 42bc). *V* 44c–h is about the ***diabolos*** and his deeds, which are quite different from Abraham and his deeds (*vv* 39–40).[36]

35 We follow the word order of the Greek text.

V 47, CONCLUSION [3]:[37]

The conclusion has the form of a chiasm:

V 47a	He who is ***from*** God	A
	hears the words of God.	B
v 47c	Therefore you ***do not hear***	B'
	because you are not ***from*** God	A'

V 47d reflects *v* 44 and, via *v* 44, *v* 41cd as well. In *v* 41cd the Jews argued that God was their father and that they were not 'from' fornication; then in *v* 44a Jesus said that they were from the ***diabolos***. Now, finally, in *v* 47d he says that they are not 'from' God. The third argument (*vv* 41b–47) brings the issue of the identity of the Jews to an end, as can be illustrated by the recurrence of a number of key words from both the first (*vv* 31–37) and second argument (*vv* 38–41a).[38]

36 According to Neyrey ('Jesus the Judge', 9), *vv* 41–47 make up the third test. *Vv* 41a–44 form a chiasm (translation and dividion in verses by Neyrey):
A. You ***do*** what your father ***did*** (*v* 41a)
B. They said to him: 'We were not born of fornication; we have ***one Father, even God***' (*v* 41b)
B'. Jesus said to them: 'If ***God*** were your ***Father***, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me...'(*vv* 42–43)
A'. 'You are of ***your father the devil*** and your will is to do your ***father's*** desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, because there is no truth in him. When he ***lies***, he speaks according to his own nature' (v 44).

37 According to Neyrey, the test of *vv* 41a–47 is built up as follows: statement in *v* 41a, misunderstanding in *vv* 42–43 and explanation in *vv* 44–47 ('Jesus the Judge', 9–10).

38 Key words from *vv* 31–37 that recur in *vv* 41b–47 are: 1] to believe (*v* 31a); 2] my (=Jesus') word (*vv* 31b. 37c); 3] the truth (*v* 32); 4] sin (*v* 34cd); 5] () (*see next page*)

1.2.2. Part two, John 8,48–58(59): discussion about the identity of Jesus

In *v* 48, a new phase in the debate starts with the reintroduction of Jesus' opponents, henceforth named 'the Jews' (*vv* 48a.52a.57a.). The debate concentrates on the identity of Jesus; it results in the attempt of the Jews to stone him (*v* 59). The discussion (*vv* 48–58) runs according to two, hardly separable lines: the Jews argue that Jesus is possessed, whereas he underlines his relation with the Father, whom he honours and who honours him (first line, α). Because of this relation, keeping Jesus' word means freedom from death (second line, β). In *v* 51 the discussion turns to Jesus' claims. When the Jews ask who Jesus thinks he is, he refers to Abraham. Abraham has seen him: Jesus is ἐγὼ εἰμί, and consequently pre-existent. The debate ends with a narrative verse (*v* 59) telling that while the Jews try to stone him Jesus leaves the Temple, the location of the debate.[39]

to kill (ἀποκτείνω; *v* 37b). Key words from *vv* 38–41a that recur in vv 41b-47 are: 6] father (*vv* 38ab.39b.41a); 7] to hear (*vv* 38b.40c); 8] speech, to speak (*v* 40b); 9] to do (*vv* 39b.41a); 10] man (ἄνθρωπος; *v* 40a); 5] to kill (*v* 40b). They recur in vv 41b–47 as follows: 6] father (*vv* 41b.42b.44abi); 8] speech, to speak (*v.* 43a); 2] my (Jesus') word (*v* 43b); 7] to hear (*vv* 43b.47bc); 9] to do (*v* 44b); 5] murderer + 10] man (ἀνθρωποκτόνος, *v* 44c); 3] the truth (*vv* 45a.46b); 1] to believe (*vv* 45b) and 4] sin (*v* 46). Out of these only 2] my word and 6] father recur in *vv* 48–59, in *vv* 51.52 and *vv* 53.54.56 respectively.

39 In this part of the pericope, Neyrey ('Jesus the Judge', 10–13) distinguishes a fourth test (*vv* 48–55), consisting of the statement 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death' (*v* 51), the misunderstanding in *v* 52 and the explanation in *vv* 53–55, and a final test in *vv* 56–59 (statement in *v* 56, misunderstanding in *v* 57, and explanation in *v* 58). The action of the Jews in *v* 59 'confirms the charge of Jesus throughout the forensic proceeding that they are murderers, like their father the devil' ('Jesus the Judge', 13). Unlike Neyrey, we have made no further subdivision in *vv* 48–58 (59), because of the entwinement of the various themes in this part of the pericope.

V 48 [*a*] OPENING OF THE DEBATE

THE JEWS

you are a Samaritan (= *first accusation*, 1) YOU ARE

you have a demon (= *second accusation*, 2)

vv 49–57 [*b*] DISCUSSION

vv 49–51: JESUS

I have no demon (= *reaction* to 2) theme α =

honour and dishonour glory and honour

glory for Jesus

If you keep my [Jesus'] ***word***

you will not see death (= promise) theme β = death

vv 52–53: THE JEWS

you have a demon (= *second accusation*, 2)

ABRAHAM our father died (=falsification of the promise)

and the prophets

and say: theme β

If you keep my ***word***

you will not taste death? (= quasi-quotation of the promise)

Are you greater than ABRAHAM our father

who died?

and the prophets died. theme β

Whom do you make of yourself?

vv 54–56: JESUS

glory for Jesus theme α

which comes from the Father

(...)Jesus keeps God's ***word***

ABRAHAM your father saw my day

v 57 THE JEWS

Have you seen ABRAHAM? (=misunderstanding)

*v*58 [c] CONCLUSION

JESUS Amen amen

before ABRAHAM ἐγὼ εἰμι (= reaction on accusations 1 + 2) I AM

(= final answer to question in *v*53)

*v*59 *Narrative conclusion*

*V*48, BEGINNING OF THE DEBATE [*a*]:

The accusation of the Jews against Jesus is twofold (*v*48b-d):

(Do we not rightly say)
you are a Samaritan [1]
and you have a demon? [2]

*Vv*49–57, REACTION, DIALOGUE [*b*]:

Jesus only defends himself against the second accusation (*v*49b):

I have no demon.

The debate continues about honour and dishonour (*vv*49c–50a) in connection with judgement (*v*50b). The deeds of Jesus are in contrast with the deeds of the Jews (*v*49cd):

but I honour my father
and you dishonour me.

and in accordance with the deeds of the Father (*v*50ab):

I do not seek my glory
there is one who seeks and judges.

*V*51 introduces the theme of eternal life:

Amen amen, I say to you:
If anyone keeps my word
he will not *see* death forever.

The Jews repeat their reproach that Jesus is possessed (*v*52b, cf. *v*48d) and accuse him of making too much of himself (*v*53). Their repetition of Jesus' words (*v*51) is not a literal quotation (*v*52).

*V*52 Now we know that you have a demon.
Abraham died, and the prophets,
and you say:
If anyone keeps my word,
he will not ***taste*** death forever.
*v*53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?
and the prophets died;
whom do you make of yourself?

The promise is part of the debate about Jesus' identity and authority. The Jews compare Jesus to Abraham and the prophets; the reproach that Jesus thinks he is greater than Abraham and the prophets (*v*53a) is rephrased in *v*53c, 'whom do you make of yourself (σεαυτόν)?' *V*54b echoes the word 'yourself' of *v*53d and carries on the theme of honour and glory of *vv*49–50:

If I glorify myself (ἐμαυτόν).

Jesus points out that his glory does not come from himself, but from his father. The way Jesus knows (οἶδα) of God ('my Father') is contrary to the lack of knowledge (οὐ + γινώσκω) of the Jews (*vv*54–55):

*V*54 If I glorify myself,
then my glory is nothing;
it is my Father who glorifies me
of whom you say:
our God is He,
and you do not know him,

*v*55 but I know him.
When I would say that I do not know him
then I would be like you: a liar,
but I know him
and I keep his word.

*V*55f reinterprets *v*51bc (cf. *v*52de): one should keep the word of Jesus (*v*51bc) because Jesus keeps the word of God. Again the discussion is about Abraham (*v*56):

*V*56a	Abraham your father rejoiced	A (joy)
	that he **was to see** ***my day***	B (to see) Jesus' day object, Abraham subject
	and he **saw**	B (to see)
	and was glad.	A (joy)

Jesus gives his picture of 'Abraham your father' (*v*56; cf. *v*53a) against the picture given by the Jews (*vv*52–53). The words 'to see' and 'day' of *v*56 give rise to the misunderstanding of *v*57. The Jews interpret the object of *v*56 as subject and vice versa:

*V*57a	The Jews then said to him:	
	You are not yet fifty ***years*** (old)	Jesus subject,
	and have you ***seen*** Abraham?	Abraham object

*V*58(59), CONCLUSION [*c*]:
The amen-saying of *v*58 follows from the misunderstanding of *v*57 and is the climactic conclusion of the whole debate about the identity of Jesus.

Amen amen, I say to you
before Abraham became I am (ἐγὼ εἰμί).

In *v*48c the Jews had scolded Jesus for being a Samaritan and being

possessed; *v*58 provides the the final anwer to this accusation, but on a higher level: Jesus is pre-existent, since he is (ἐγὼ εἰμί) even before Abraham existed. The pre-existence of Jesus contrasts with the mortality of Abraham and the prophets (*vv*52c, 53a-c). At the same time, *v*58c is the answer to the question whom Jesus makes of himself (*v*53d). The declaration of Jesus' pre-existence concludes the debate. The only reaction left to the Jews is to punish Jesus by stoning him (*v*59):

> Then they took stones to throw at him
> Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple.

2

CLOSE READING, STYLE AND LITERARY UNITY OF JOHN 8,31–59

In this chapter we will offer a description of John 8,31–59 from different methodological perspectives. We will begin with narrative criticism and style criticism, both synchronic approaches that will help us describe the text as it is, and continue with two diachronic approaches, source criticism and redaction criticism, which aim at describing the genesis of the text. The present chapter is not meant to give insight into the circumstances in which John wrote his Gospel, and which may have influenced the creation of our pericope; this subject shall be treated later in this study.

We will begin with a close reading, the structure of which is based on the division of John 8,31–59 as proposed in the preceding chapter (*vv* 31–37; 38–41a; 41b–47; *vv* 48–58); the subsections of section 1 cover the separate arguments.

The close reading has a threefold purpose:

a) To investigate whether our pericope in its present form is a coherent and meaningful entity, or whether it contains ruptures or contradictions that cannot be explained by narrative criticism alone.

b) To investigate whether the role of Abraham in our pericope can be explained from the context of the Fourth Gospel itself or the context of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine letters. Parallels with New Testament writings outside the Johannine corpus are mentioned as far as they are evident or indispensable for the correct interpretation of John; the same applies to references to the Old Testament.

c) To decide where John's picture of Abraham needs further tradition-historical investigation. The origin of the Johannine depiction of Abraham is the subject matter of the following chapters.

For the stylistic analysis of John 8,31–59 we shall turn to authors who have published extensively about the style of John: E. Schweizer,[40] E. Ruckstuhl-P. Dschulnigg,[41] and Boismard and Lamouille.[42] Style criticism is often used as a device to support or – in most cases – criticize form-critical or redaction-critical reconstructions of texts. Boismard and Lamouille have developed a literary critical theory partly based on stylistic evidence; as we shall see, however, their theory proves problematic with regard to John 8,31–59.

Close reading and style criticism provide the framework for section 3, where we shall evaluate several theories about the literary prehistory of John 8,31–59. The investigation of the genesis of our pericope is not undertaken for its own sake, but with regard to the main issue of this study: the role of Abraham in the conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish environment at the end of the first century C.E.:

a) If it can be demonstrated that the present text of John 8,31–59 is the result of a long literary and editorial process and consists of several literary layers, each with its own style and theology, then

40 Schweizer, *EGO EIMI*: ***Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johanneischen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag der Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums*** (FRLANT 56; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1939).

41 Ruckstuhl-P. Dschulnigg ***Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage im Johannesevangelium: Die johanneischen Sprachmerkmale auf dem Hintergrund des Neuen Testaments und des zeitgenössischen hellenistischen Schrifttums*** (NTOA 17; Freiburg i.d. Schweiz/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). This is an elaboration of Ruckstuhl's previous study ***Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums: Der gegenwärtige Stand der einschlägigen Forschungen*** (Studia Friburgensia NF 5; Freiburg i.d. Schweiz; Universitätsverlag, 1951, rev. ed. NTOA 5; Freiburg i.d. Schweiz/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

42 Boisnard & Lamouille ***Jean***; cf. ***Introduction***, n. 14.

the assumption is justified that the development of the text also reflects the development of the conflict afore mentioned.

b) If such a literary genesis cannot be demonstrated, we have to investigate whether the development of arguments in John 8,31–59 in itself may be an indication of a possible development of the presumed conflict.

c) If this cannot be proven either, the question arises whether we should not regard John 8,31–59 as the reflection of one stage of the conflict, perhaps the final stage. In that case we must look for another explanation of the hostility between Jesus and the Jews and the role of Abraham within the conflict.

2.1. John 8,31–59: close reading

As has been remarked in the previous chapter, John 8,31–59 is part of an episode taking place during the festival of Tabernacles, John 7,1–10,21, which is marked by open hostility between Jesus and his audience. Their disagreement is about the Sonship of Jesus, the central issue of the Fourth Gospel. The episode of John 7,1–10,21 itself should be located within John 1–12, which focuses on the preaching of Jesus to various groups of people, and his rejection by many of them him because of his self-proclamation as the Son, in contrast with John 13–17.20(21), which addresses the community of people who believe in Jesus. Our pericope deals with a Jewish audience that initially believes in Jesus but eventually refuses to accept him as the pre-existent Son. Their refusal becomes particularly clear in *v*59, when they try to stone him.

Before taking up the actual close reading of John 8,31–59, we must turn to the problem that has been discussed briefly in chapter 1 of this study, i.e. the interpretation of the introductory phrase John 8,31a. The introduction is problematic in relation to both *v*30 and the dialogue it introduces, especially *vv*33.37.40. In our view, *v*30 (ταῦτα

αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν) refers to the reaction of the audience to what Jesus has been saying in *vv*21–29, while *v*31a (ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους) marks a new step in the debate. Still, this reading does not explain why the author mentions these opponents' faith twice, and how their faith is to be understood in view of their hostility in 8,33–59.

It has been suggested that the double reference to the faith of Jesus' opponents indicates that *vv*30–31 refer to two different groups of believers. According to J. Swetnam,[43] the perfect participle of *v*31, πεπιστευκότα, refers to people who once believed in Jesus but no longer do so. But Swetnam's reading does not agree with the text that follows: if the people mentioned in *v*31a do not believe anymore, the appeal in *v*31bc to remain faithful does not make sense.[44]

Another objection against Swetnam's interpretation is that although the perfect participle refers to the result of a certain action, it leaves open any further effects of this action. This means that one cannot conclude from the perfect tense in *v*31a alone whether the audience still believes in Jesus or not.[45] A similar case occurs in John 6,69, where the twelve are said to have come to believe in Jesus (ἡμεῖς πεπιστεύκαμεν: perfect tense), whereas later in the story one of them is to betray him.[46]

Another argument in favour of the thesis that the people in 8,31 are not the same as in 8,30 is the assumed difference between πιστεύω εἰς

43 'The meaning of πεπιστευκότας in John 8,31', *Bib* 61 (1980), 107–109.

44 Thus G. Segalla, 'Un appello alla perseveranza nella fede in Gv 8,31-32?', *Bib* 62 (1981), 387–388.

45 Dodd ('A l'arrière-plan d'un dialogue Johannique', *RHPR* 37 [1957], 7) argues that this is not the case: 'Ces personnes donc sont devenues croyantes et le sont demeurées jusqu'au moment auquel se réfère le récit qui s'ensuit.'

46 Swetnam does not refer to the parallel in John 6,69 (καὶ ἡμεῖς πεπιστεύκαμ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεου), which has the perfect tense of πιστεύω, though not the participle. Since he mentions Acts 15,5 and 21,20 in order to show that the perfect participles of pisteuvw can refer to people who have believed and ***still do so***, one wonders why John 8,31a should be read differently.

(*v* 30), which allegedly indicates a stable faith, and πιστεύω with dative (*v* 31), which is supposed to indicate a threatened or unstable faith.[47] If one analyses the use of both expressions throughout the Fourth Gospel, however, one must conclude that there is no qualitative difference between them. In John we repeatedly find people who come to believe in Jesus (πιστεύω εἰς) because they have seen him perform miracles (2,23; 7,31; 11,45; 12,11; cf. 12,37). Considering the fact that John is critical about this kind of faith (2,24–25; 6,26),[48] it cannot be maintained that πιστεύω εἰς is the usual Johannine expression of a strong belief. When comparing instances where people are said to believe in Jesus (πιστεύω εἰς: 2,23; 4,39; 7,31; 11,45; 12,11) with instances with they are said to believe him (πιστεύω with dative: 4,50; 6,30; 10,37.38; 14,11), we find no indications for a stronger faith among the first group, and an instable faith among the latter group. Other illustrations of the fact that there is no difference between πιστεύω εἰς and πιστεύω with dative are to be found in 6,29–30 and 14,11–12 (cf. 12,37–38), where the terms are used alternately. Therefore, in 8,30–31 we are obviously dealing with a similar stylistic variation;[49] the conclusion seems justified that 8,30–31 has no other function than to mark off different stages in the discourse 8,12(21)–59.

The second problem, how the faith of the protagonists of *v* 31 is to be understood in relation to their hostility in 8,33–59, still remains unsolved.[50] Their very first words to Jesus are already marked by criticism

47 Thus Segalla, 'Appello', 388; I. de la Potterie, *La verité dans Saint Jean,* (AnBib 73–74; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), II. 842–843.

48 Cf. D.A. Carson about John 2,22 (*The Gospel of John* [Leicester/Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity/Eerdmans, 1991], 183).

49 Cf. Dodd, 'A l'arrière-plan', 7. In her extensive expositions of the various positions regarding John 8,30–31, D. Hunn ('Who Are "They" in John 8:33?', *CBQ* 66 [2004] 387–399) comes to a similar conclusion (p. 394): 'This may explain why John specifies the group in *v.* 31; it is not to introduce a new group but to indicate clearly that this is the same group as in *v.* 30.'

50 Hunn ('Who Are "They" in John 8,33?', 395–399) suggests that in John 8,33 'they' possibly refers to a small group within the larger group of John (*see next page*)

(8,33), and in 8,37.40 they are even accused of trying to kill him. Therefore, on the following pages we shall try to ascertain whether the tension between 8,31 and the subsequent debate can be sufficiently explained by means of data from the Fourth Gospel itself.

2.1.1. *John 8, 31–47: Who are* οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι?

In chapter 1 of this study, John 8,31–59 has been divided into two parts, *vv* 31–47 and *vv* 48–58(59). The first part consists of a dialogue about the identity of Jesus' interlocutors; the second part is a dialogue about the identity of Jesus. In the first part, Jesus' interlocutors are described as people who believe in Jesus but do not act accordingly. In *v* 31 they are designated as 'the Jews who had come to believe him'; in the following verses they are referred to as 'they' or 'them'. It is not until *v* 48 that we find another explicit designation.

2.1.1.1. *Part one, first argument: freedom and slavery (vv 31–37)*

In *vv* 31b–32, Jesus addresses Jews who believe in him. From his appeal to remain in his word and so become real disciples (*v* 31bc), it is evident that their belief is under pressure and in need of strengthening. Dis-

8,30–31. She argues (p. 397) that in various instances in John 7-8 'they' or 'you' does not refer to the group mentioned immediately before. In John 7,30 for instance, 'they' are not the multitude or the small group of people from Jerusalem addressed in 7,28, but the officers sent by the Pharisees in 7,32. In 8,12, 'them' does not seem to refer to the chief priests and Pharisees of 7,45–52, but to a larger audience, because 'he spoke these words... as he taught in the Temple' (8,20). However, in John 8,13 not a large crowd, but the Pharisees reply to the words of Jesus in 8,12. In our pericope, unlike John 7,26.28.32, no alternative antagonists occur; moreover, the thematic line between John 8,31 and 8,46–47 (belief and the word of Jesus) makes it difficult to imagine that not all people referred to in *v* 31 are included in the arguments of *vv* 33–47.

cipleship seems to be a problem, as it is in other passages in John. In John 6,60–71 for instance, a number of disciples turn away from Jesus, because they cannot bear his words. In John's version of Peter's denial (18,15–27), the servants of the High Priest ask Peter if he is one of the disciples of Jesus (18,17.25).[51] At the very moment when the High Priest questions Jesus about his disciples and teachings (18,19), Peter denies being a disciple of Jesus.[52]

According to John 8,32, only true disciples shall know the truth and be liberated by it. Throughout the Fourth Gospel truth is identified with Jesus: he is the Word become incarnate, full of grace and truth (1,14); grace and truth have come through him (1,17). He is the way, the truth, and the life (14,6); he bears testimony to the truth (18,37). John the Baptist is said to have borne witness to the truth (5,33), which again is to be identified with Jesus. In our pericope it is suggested that one becomes free by believing in Jesus (*v*32). The verb 'to become' is essential: it implies that the people to whom these words are addressed are not free yet. This is an implication they are unwilling to accept, and therefore they reply that they are 'seed of Abraham' and, as a consequence, have never been slaves to anybody (*v*33ab). How can Jesus say that they need to become free? Two elements of this answer need further explanation: firstly, what is the link between Abraham and freedom? And secondly, why is freedom worded and interpreted in negative terms, as absence of slavery?

As to the question of the link between Abraham and freedom, it should be noted that John 8,31–37 is the only place in the entire Johannine corpus where the issue of freedom is discussed. Freedom is a rare topic in

51 The issue of discipleship is absent from the Synoptic versions of the story (Matt 26,69–75; Mark 14,66–72; Luke 22,54–62) and should therefore be regarded as a Johannine addition.

52 Other references to discipleship under pressure are to be found in 19,38, which says that Joseph of Arimathea fears the Jews, and in 20,19, where the same is said about the twelve.

the New Testament, especially in relation to Abraham. The only other text in the New Testament in which 'seed of Abraham' is associated with freedom is Gal 4,22–23.[53] Galatians distinguishes between two sons of Abraham, who are defined as the son of the slave (παιδίσκη) versus the son of the free woman (ἐλευθέρα). Here freedom depends on the position of the mother, not on that of Abraham himself. Moreover, the Pauline context is quite different from the Johannine, as we shall see when we examine the Letter to the Galatians more thoroughly in chapter 4 of this study.[54] With regard to the relation with the Old Testament, the conjunction of 'seed of Abraham' and 'slavery' in John 8,33, may echo Gen 15,13–14, where we find the same conjunction. In Gen 15,13–14, God foretells Abraham that his descendants ('your seed') will be slaves in a land that is not theirs, and will come out after four hundred years of slavery.[55] With regard to the disciples Jesus has in view in John 8,33, the allusion to Gen 15,13–14 means that they are revealed as people with a somewhat distorted view of their own history, for their negation of ever having been slaves to anybody contradicts Scripture itself. In *v* 33 we have an example of the intended ambiguity that is typical of John: on the one hand, these Jews argue that freedom depends on their descent from Abraham and their consequently being endowed with a certain status. On the other hand, they undermine their own argument by alluding to a text which says exactly the opposite. The allusion to Gen 15,13–14 does not tell us much about the exact

53 Cf. H. W. Hollander, '"Vrijheid" en "slavernij" in Johannes 8:31–36', *NedTTs* 48 (1994), 265–267.

54 In Luke, Abraham is associated with redemption (cf. 1,73–74; 13,16), but this is not described as ἐλευθερία. A more thorough reading of the relevant texts of Luke and Paul shall be undertaken in the next chapter of this study.

55 LXX Gen 15,13–14 reads: καὶ ἐρρέθη πρὸς Αβραμ Γινώσκων γνώσῃ ὅτι πάροικον ἔσται τὸ σπέρμα σου ἐν γῇ οὐκ ἰδίᾳ, καὶ δουλώσουσιν αὐτοὺς καὶ κακώσουσιν α ὐτοὺς καὶ ταπεινώσουσιν αὐτοὺς τετρακόσια ἔτη. τὸ δὲ ἔθνος, ᾧ ἐὰν δουλεύσωσ ιν, κρινῶ ἐγω· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐξελεύσονται ὧδε μετὰ ἀποσκευῆς πολλῆς. John 8,33 has σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ and δουλεύω; LXX Gen 15,13–14 has σπέρμα σου (MT זרעך) and δουλεύῳ δουλόω (MT עבד).

concept of freedom in John 8,33: the question whether the Jews themselves interpret it in a political, social, spiritual or religious sense does not show from the text itself and shall be treated later.

As to the second question, the wording of freedom as the absence of slavery, one notices that the shift from 'freedom' (*v* 32) to 'slavery' (*v* 33) has two effects. It discredits the opponents of Jesus,[56] and enables the evangelist to expose his own ideas about the nature of freedom and slavery (*vv* 34–36). From the Johannine perspective slavery is to be understood as slavery under sin (*v* 34):

> Amen, amen I say to you
> everybody who does sin
> is a slave to sin.

Here we find two different views of freedom and slavery. Whereas for the Jews freedom and slavery are related to descent from Abraham and the status of their ancestor, John explains freedom and slavery in terms of sin and freedom from sin, which are to be understood in terms of belief in Jesus (cf. 8,21–24). According to John, sin is the deliberate and persistent denial of the truth, the refusal to accept God's envoy (15,22). Is consists in nurturing hatred against him and the Father (15,23–24), being blind to the revelation (9,39–41), and not believing (16,9). The consequences of the Johannine concept of slavery and sin are expressed in a metaphor or ***Bildwort*** about a household where the slave has a temporary place only, whereas the son holds a permanent position (*v* 35):

> The slave does not remain in the house forever,
> the son remains forever.

56 Thus J. Cazeaux , 'Concept ou mémoire? La rhétorique de Jean, chap. 8, v. 12–59', *Origine et postérité de l'évangile de Jean* (Lectio divina 143; ed. A. Marchadour; Paris: Cerf, 1990), 304–305. The idea that in John 8,33 the evangelist intends to discredit the Jews corresponds to previous misunderstandings about the history of the Jews, e.g. John 5,45–47.

This *Bildwort* is interpreted in *v* 36: the slave is not mentioned anymore, the son becomes the Son, the only one who can give real freedom:

> If then the Son will make you free,
> you will really be free.

Whereas the antithesis of the *Bildwort* is between son and slave, the antithesis in *v* 36 is between freedom and absence of freedom. This shift of concepts suggests that the real point of *vv* 34–36 as a whole is not the relation between slave and son, but the opposition between freedom and slavery. This is emphasized by the fact that in *v* 36 Jesus applies *vv* 34c–35 to his opponents: 'if the Son makes you free, you will really become free.' If they were to believe in the Son (*v* 36), they would become like the son and heir of *v* 35; if they were to believe in the Son, they would no longer be slaves to sin (*v* 34). Because they are descendants of Abraham, they consider themselves as freemen (*v* 33), and therefore the opponents of Jesus must have identified themselves with the son and heir of the Bildwort. In sociological terms, the son of the household is free by definition. In consequence of *v* 34, he is free from sin as well. However, being free (and consequently being a son) turns out to be conditional: it is the Son who makes men free. The fact that they refuse to accept him and thereby do not match this condition makes them slaves who have no permanent place in this house (*v* 35).

John 8,37 confirms the Jewish claim of descent from Abraham in *v* 33 with a paraphrasing repetition of the latter verse ('I know you are seed of Abraham'). At the same time Jesus criticizes his opponents for their wish to kill him (*v* 37b) that is at odds with their alleged descent ('but you intend to kill me'). In *v* 37c, the reasoning of *vv* 31–37 is rounded off by the argument that the Jews wish to kill Jesus because his word has no place in them (cf. *v* 31b). While the debate started with an appeal to remain in the word of Jesus (*v* 31b), it ends with the conclusion that the people to whom this appeal was directed are unable to respond to it.

2.1.1.2. *Part one, second argument: Abraham as the father of* οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι (*vv*38–41a)

In *vv*38–41a the debate about the relationship with Abraham is set forth in terms of imitation of Abraham. But before Abraham comes into view again, John describes the conflicting positions of Jesus and these Jews. On one hand, Jesus ***has seen*** things with the father (*v*38a), and speaks of what he saw (*v*38a; cf. 3,11.31–32; 5,19); the Jews on the other hand ***do*** what they ***hear*** from the father (*v*38b). It is not until *v*40c that the name of Jesus' father is mentioned. In *v*40 the identity of the father of the Jews is still unknown and will be revealed later. However, in the meantime it has become obvious that despite their suggestions (*v*39b), Abraham cannot be their father. The tension between the fact that they are Abraham's offspring (*vv*33.37a) and their desire to kill Jesus (*v*37b) is elaborated in *vv*39–40. Here the evangelist argues that being children of Abraham (τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ) means doing the works of Abraham (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ, 39dc), and suggests that these Jews, although they are his physical offspring, are not entitled to call themselves his 'children' (*v*40). Being the free son and heir is conditional (*vv*34–36), and so is belonging to Abraham.

As to Abrahams 'works',[57] in *v*40, John only explains what they are not. Abraham's works are unlike those of Jesus' opponents, unlike their intention to kill the man who reveals God's truth (*v*40). What they are like may be elucidated by John 6,28–29. In 6,28, the people ask Jesus what they should do in order to do the works of God (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ). He replies that they should believe in him whom God has sent. In our pericope, the presupposed works of Abraham must be the opposite of what his descendants do. They wish to kill him; Abraham certainly would not do so. This suggests that Abraham's

57 In John, in most cases the term 'works' concerns the works of Jesus, given to him by the Father (e.g. 5,36; 7,3.21; 9,3.4; 10,37; cf. 4,34, 'the work'). 3,19–21 is about the works of the evildoers as opposed to the works of those 'who do the truth'. In 7,7 Jesus testifies to the evil works of the world.

works have something to do with accepting God's envoy. Moreover, because of the discrepancy between Abraham and Jesus' opponents, one must conclude that Abraham cannot be their real father. Their father must be somebody else, someone who incites them to murder God's messenger (*v* 41a).

2.1.1.3. *Part one, third argument: God as the father of* οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι (*vv* 41b–47)

The Jews correctly understand *v* 41a as a hint that their father is unknown. But they ignore the suggestion that they do the works (τα ἔργα, *v* 41a) of this father, and instead focus on the question of their descent. They retort that they are not of dubious birth ('we are not born from fornication') and that God is their only father (*v* 41cd). Because of the emphatic 'we' (ἡμεῖς), *v* 41c ('we were not born from fornication') is sometimes regarded as an insulting suggestion that Jesus is of dubious birth.[58] But such an interpretation is not necessary for a proper understanding of the text: because 'we' in *v* 41c corresponds to 'you' (ὑμεῖς) in *v* 41a, it is preferable to read *v* 41cd as a self-defence rather than an accusation; moreover, the following verses, which are about the father of the Jews and not about the family background of Jesus, make more sense when *v* 41cd is understood as self-defence and not as slander against Jesus. The objection by the Jews 'we were not born from fornication' (*v* 41c) probably reflects the Old

58 Brown (*John*, I. 357) for instance, considers v 41c a reference to the Virgin Birth, while C.K. Barrett (*The Gospel according to John* [2d ed.; London: SPCK , 1978], 348) says that the Jews accuse Jesus of being born from fornication. Schnackenburg on the other hand (*Johannesevangelium*, II. 285) argues that the Virgin Birth does not play a role in the Fourth Gospel. In John 6,42, in the context of the discussion about the bread from heaven, the Jews argue against the claims of Jesus that he himself is this bread, that he is the son of Joseph, and that both his father and mother are known. This reference to his human kin is an argument against his divine origin.

Testament image of idolatry as fornication.[59] In Hos 2,6 for example, Israel appears as the adulterous wife, playing the whore and going after her lovers (i.e. strange gods), who seem to have more to offer than her husband (i.e. God). In Exod 34,15–16 God cautions the Israelites lest they make a covenant with the other inhabitants of the land, because that will ultimately tempt their sons to 'play the harlot' after other gods.[60] Thus, in order to oppose the suggestion that they are idolaters and disbelievers, the Jews in John 8, 41 emphasize that they are faithful to God by calling him their only father (*v*41d).[61]

*Vv*42–47 explores and subsequently rejects the idea that God is the father of these Jews. If he were their father, they would behave differently towards Jesus; they would even love him, since he is God's envoy (*v*42bc).[62] But this is not so: they do not understand who he is, notwithstanding the words he has spoken to them previously (8,18–19.25–29). They cannot hear his word (*v*43), even if it comes from God (cf. *v*40). Their incapability to understand and hear is due to their unwillingness to accept Jesus as the pre-existent Son (cf. 6,60). Since they are from the devil (*v*44), not from God, they are cut off from his word.

*V*44 is notoriously complex, both in form and content. Because of the double genitive in 44[a], (ἐκ) τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου, a number of scholars are convinced that in *v*44 Cain, and not the devil, is the alleged father of the Jews,[63] and that the present text with its double

59 See for the same connection of idolatry and fornication e.g. Lev 17,7; 20,5–6; Numb 25,1–2; Deut 31,16; Judg 2,17; Isa 57,3; Jer 2,20; 3,1.6–25; Hos 1,2; 4,10.12–14.

60 For this reference, see Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 342–343; Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium*, II. 285.

61 *V*41d is possibly an allusion to Isa 63,16: 'For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us (...)'; see chapter 3 of this study.

62 Cf. John 16,27 for a similar connection between loving Jesus and the fact that he is sent by the Father.

63 Wellhausen (*Das Evangelium Johannis* [Berlin: Georg Reim, 1908], 42–44) and E. Hirsch (*Studien zum Vierten Evangelium* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1936], 79) regard the present form of *v*44 as a revision of the original text. (*continued on next page*)

genitive is a corruption of the original. This interpretation is improbable for a number of reasons: firstly, the presumption that $\mathfrak{p}^{44}$ is a corruption of the original text does not find support in the textual tradition;[64] secondly, the grammatical construction (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς) τοῦ διαβόλου (a substantive + article without further additions, used as an attributive) is a typical example of Johannine style;[65] thirdly, the remark about the devil in John 8,44 does not stand on its own, but has parallels in both the Fourth Gospel itself and 1 John. The devil's paternity of people who seek to kill Jesus is in accordance with his role as the instigator of the betrayal by Judas Iscariot (John 6,70; 13,2.21–30).[66] The parallels between 8,31–47 and the passages about Judas suggests that the 'believing' Jews of our pericope are false believers who play a part comparable to that of Judas Iscariot. The problem of false belief also forms the background of 1 John. The author of this

Wellhausen proposes to read ἐκ τοῦ Καϊν instead of the double genitive, whereas Hirsch prefers to replace only the second genitive, τοῦ διαβόλου, by Καϊν. N.A. Dahl ('Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels', *Apophoreta* [FS E. Haenchen; ed. W. Eltester and F.H. Kettler; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964], 76–84), mentions two possible versions of what he considers to be the original text, i.e. ἐκ τοῦ πρωτοτόκου (υἱοῦ) ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου and ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου; he rates the latter the most probable. For a more recent argumentation in favour of Cain as the father of the Jews in John 8,44 see J.M. Lieu, 'What Was from the Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles,' *NTS* 39 (1993), 471–472.

64 See the critical apparatus of the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland: the absence of τοῦ πατρὸς in K and sys confirms rather than questions the fact that the original text had 'the devil', and not 'Cain'.

65 Cf. Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg, ***Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage***, 86–87: other instances where this feature occurs within the Fourth Gospel are 2,23; 7,2; 11,13; 13,1; 18,1.17, with 18,17 as the closest stylistic parallel to 8,44.

66 Note that the betrayal by Judas has already been mentioned in the context of 6,60–71. According to 6,60, many disciples leave Jesus because they cannot bear his word. Simon Peter affirms the belief of the twelve (6,69), but Jesus knows that one of them will betray him. The parallel between 6,60b and 8,43b is particularly significant; the question whether this parallel implies that the (false) disciples of 6,60 and 8,43 belong to the same or a comparable group of people shall be explored in chapter 5 of this study.

letter warns his flock against false teachers, arguing that whoever commits sin (i.e. does not love one's brother) is from the devil, who 'has sinned from the beginning' (1 John 3,8).[67] If one does not love his or her brother, one is not from God (1 John 3,10). Children of God should not be like Cain, who stems from the devil and murdered his brother (1 John 3,12).[68] The parallel with 1 John 3 confirms that in John 8,44 the devil is indeed the father of Jesus' opponents, and that being from the devil expresses itself in nurturing hatred towards one's brother. The devil is the antipode of both Jesus and God: he is a murderer and a liar (8,44cf),[69] whereas Jesus speaks the truth (*vv*40.45); the lie comes from the devil (cf. *v*44g, ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων), the truth from God (*v*40).

John 8,45–47 again emphasizes the disbelief of the opponents of Jesus. As children of the devil they are unable to hear the truth, and because Jesus speaks the truth they cannot believe him (*v*45). The remark 'Who of you convicts me of sin?' (*v*46a) recalls a previous phase of the debate, where it has been said that the Son, the personification of the truth, makes true believers free from slavery under sin (*vv*34.36). The irony of *v*46a is obvious: the sinful – because murderous – opponents of Jesus are asked to convince him of his sin.[70] The answer to the rhetorical question why they do not believe Jesus (*v*46b) is given in the maxim 'He who is from God hears the word of God' (*v*47a). *V*47b turns the maxim into a mirror for the opponents: they do not hear because they are not from God. Their initial claim to have God as their father (*v*41), has proven to be false.

67 In John 8,31–47 the Jews sin (*v* 34) because they want to kill Jesus (*vv* 37.40); the devil is described as a murderer from the beginning.

68 In this context Cain is called ἀνθρωποκτόνος (1 John 3,15), because he has murdered his brother. In John 8,44 this term is used for the devil, the original ἀνθρωποκτόνος and the force behind these Jews, whose wish, according to *v* 40, is to kill (ἀποκτεῖναι) the man (ἄνθρωπον) who spoke God's truth.

69 The picture of the devil as a murderer and liar is probably based on the traditional identification of the devil with the serpent of Genesis 3.

70 Cf. 16,8–9: the Paraclete will convince the world of their sin, i.e. the fact that they have not believed in Jesus; see Schnackenburg, ***Johannesevangelium***, III. 146–147.

2.1.2. *Part two, John 8,48–58(59): Who is Jesus?*

In the second part of our pericope John focuses on the identity of Jesus. The arguments used here are partly to be found elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel; *vv*48–51 in particular recall the discussions in other chapters.

The outcome of the debate in *vv*31–47 is that the evangelist reintroduces the 'believing Jews' of *v*31 as 'the Jews' per se. In *v*48bc the Jews call Jesus a Samaritan and accuse him of having a demon. From John's remark that 'Jews do not associate with Samaritans' (4,9) and the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman about true worship ('You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews,' 4,22) it follows that 'Samaritan' has a negative connotation, which explains why the Jews use it in 8,48 as a term of abuse. On the other hand, is it important to note the positive picture of the Samaritans in John 4,39–42.[71] We should therefore reckon with the possibility that John 8,48 has a touch of ambiguity and irony. In the debate that follows (*vv*49–58), Jesus ignores the accusation that he is a Samaritan, but does deny that he is possessed (*vv*48b.49b). As in other instances where the Jews accuse Jesus of having a demon (7,20 and 10,20), the

71 In the course of the discussion about the doctrines of the Samaritans and the Jews (4,20–22), John makes Jesus say that salvation is from the Jews (4,22), but subsequently he pictures the Samaritans, and not the Jews, as people who come to genuine belief in Jesus (4,39–42). According to Matt 10,5, Jesus sent the twelve disciples out to 'the lost sheep of Israel', rather than to the Gentiles and the Samaritans. In Luke 9,51–55 the Samaritans are pictured as negative antipodes of the Jews, since they refuse to accept Jesus. On the other hand, Luke describes the Good Samaritan as a true neighbour, as opposed to the priest and the Levite representing the Temple cult (Luke 10,25–37). The Jewish audience would expect an Israelite triad: Priest–Levi–Israelite, but Jesus sets an outsider (Samaritan) as an example for Jews. The Samaritan leper of Luke 17,11–19 is the only one among the lepers who gives praise to God for having been cleansed: once more the outsider serves as an example or critic. The reference to Samaria in Acts 8,4–25 is another matter; it is uncertain whether the picture of the Samaritans as people who are inclined to magic as presented in Acts, explains the remark in John.

debate is about the authority of Jesus and his relation to God. Jesus honours his Father (*v*49c) and does not seek his own glory (50a), and therefore his Father will honour him (*v*54d). The Jews on the other hand, dishonour Jesus (*v*49d), and will be sought and judged by God (*v*50d).

According to *v*51, people who believe in Jesus ('anyone who keeps my word') will not see death.[72] This claim is all the more provocative because it is preceded by the solemn 'Amen, amen I say to you.' The Jews – not surprisingly – react with a massive response: they first repeat that Jesus is possessed (*v*52b; cf. *v*48) and then call upon Abraham and the prophets,[73] personifications of their belief in God, as their witnesses (*v*52c.53).[74] In the Fourth Gospel in general, references to prophets function as support of christological claims (e.g. 12,41); the terms 'prophet' and 'prophets'[75] apply to both prophetic writings (1,45; 6,45) and prophets as persons (1,23; 12,38–39.41).[76] In our pericope, the remark that Abraham and the prophets have died (*v*42)[77] enables John

72 In other words, they will have eternal life (cf. 5,24).

73 Luke 13,28 is the only other place in the New Testament where Abraham is mentioned together with the prophets, albeit together with and Isaac and Jacob, and in an eschatological context.

74 This appeal to 'Abraham our father' in the context of the self-definition of Jesus reminds us of John 4,12, where the Samaritan woman asks him if he is more than 'our father Jacob', because of his promise to give living water (4,11).

75 The singular 'the prophet' is to be understood as the eschatological prophet (John 1,21.25; 6,14; 7,40).

76 In 12,41 it is said that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus and spoke of him. Something similar occurs in the case of Moses, who is not pictured explicitly as a prophet, but as the man who has written the Torah and as such has written about Jesus (5,46). In chapter 6 we find an obvious parallel to John 8,52–53: Jesus is greater than Moses, for Moses *gave* Israel bread from heaven (6,31), Jesus *is* the bread of life (6,35) sent by the Father (6,32); whoever believes Jesus, the bread of life, shall have eternal life (6,40). See for the interpretation of this passage M.J.J. Menken, 'Some Remarks on the Course of the Dialogue: John 6,25–34', *Bijdr* 48 (1987), 145–146.

77 Zech 1,5 already refers to the death of Israel's 'fathers' and prophets, but by 'fathers' Zechariah means all previous generations of Israel; moreover, in the context of Zech the fathers play a negative role. In Acts 2,29–31, (*continued on next page*)

to show that Jesus is greater than they are. The reasoning in *vv*52–53 is rather complex. In *v*52 the Jews mention Abraham and the prophets and paraphrase the words of Jesus (*v*51); they compare the believer, the one who keeps Jesus' word, to Abraham and the prophets. In *v*53 on the other hand, they take the discussion to another level by accusing Jesus, not the believer, of making himself greater than Abraham and the prophets.[78] With this twist in the argument John claims that Jesus is greater than Abraham and the prophets. As to the question of the Jews what he makes of himself (*v*53), Jesus says he has the right to speak about his own honour (see *v*50; cf. 7,18; 13,31–32) because the Father has bestowed glory upon him (*v*54d). The Jews may say that his Father is their God, they do not know Him (*vv*54–55), but Jesus does know Him and would be a liar if he denied this.[79]

In *vv*56–57 the evangelist prepares the reader for the apotheosis of the debate. In *v*56 Jesus calls upon Abraham as a visionary[80] who rejoices in his vision. Abraham rejoiced because he foresaw the day of Jesus, and was glad (*v*56). In a number of instances in John (1,51, 8,56, and 12,41) 'seeing' has eschatological connotations. Whereas in the Synoptics 'seeing' in the eschatological sense occurs in the context of the Last Judgment and the coming of the Son of Man,[81] John speaks about 'seeing' in view of the presence of the Son on earth (1,51; cf. 1,14). The vision

Peter compares Jesus to 'our patriarch David' who died and was buried, but, being a prophet, foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ.

78 This incongruity has already been noted by H. Odeberg (*The Fourth Gospel. Interpreted in Its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World* [Uppsala, 1929; repr. Amsterdam: Grüner, 1968], 305–306): 'The problem is this: J's claim is that his followers will escape death, whereas the Jews answer him, as if his claim had been simply that He himself was exempt from death.'

79 The argument of Jesus in *v*55 that he would be a liar like his opponents, if he were to say that he did not know the Father, reminds us of *v*44.

80 Cf. John's picture of Isaiah in 12,41.

81 See e.g. Matt 10,23; 16,27–28; 24,30, Mark 13,26; 14,62 and Luke 21,27 about 'seeing' the coming of the Son of Man; Matt 24,15.33 about 'seeing' the various signs that precede his coming.

of Abraham in 8,56 should be understood from this Johannine concept of realized eschatology. What Abraham sees, is Jesus' presence on earth as the Son, his works, and his resurrection. The eschatological term 'my day' is not explained further. In other New Testament writings 'the day of the Son of Man' (cf. Luke 17,30) refers to the day of Judgment, while 'the day of our Lord' (e.g. 1 Cor 1,8; 5,5) and 'the day of Christ' (Phil 1,6.10) refer to the parousia . This does not seem to be the case in John 8,56. John interprets the traditional picture of the day of Christ as a reference to the entire presence of Jesus on earth as well as his resurrection.[82]

In *v*57 the Jews turn *v*56 upside down by asking how it is that Jesus has seen Abraham, especially since he is not yet fifty years old. Two aspects of this question need to be explained: is 'fifty' an arbitrary number or does it have a specific meaning? And what is meant by 'seeing Abraham'? As to the first question, there are two texts in the Old Testament, Num 4,3 and 8,24–25, which allude to fifty years in the sense of human age, namely as the maximum age for Levites to serve at the Tabernacle.[83] In Antiquity, fifty years was a respectable age: many, perhaps even most, people did not even live that long. Consequently, 'seeing Abraham' means that one has a vision of Abraham after death, as we can see in Luke 16,23. Another possibility is that the Jews in *v*57 mock Jesus for his ridiculous idea of having met with a person who lived centuries ago, and emphasize the impossibility of this meeting by mentioning 'fifty years' as only a fraction of the time separating him from Abraham. In any case, the remark in *v*57 obviously means to belittle Jesus *vis-à-vis* Abraham and shows how his antagonists misunderstand his words. The misunderstanding voices John's christology: Jesus has seen Abraham, because Jesus is pre-existent. *V*57 prepares the reader for the amen-saying in *v*58bc:

82 Cf. Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* II. 298–299.

83 Bultmann, *Johannes*, 248 n. 2; with regard to Num 4,3.39 and 8,24–25, Hoskyns (Fourth Gospel, 338) remarks that 'Fifty years is a round number marking the end of the active period of a man's life.'

Amen amen, I say to you
before Abraham became I am (ἐγὼ εἰμί).

The present tense of the verb εἰμι (*v*58c) does not seem in accordance with the fact that Abraham came into being (γενέσθαι) in the remote past. But ἐγώ εἰμί may allude to the self-revelation of God in for example Ex 3,14 (LXX: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν) and Isa 43,10 (LXX: συνῆτε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι).[84] According to John, the existence of Jesus is beyond our time: he was, is, and will be, because he is with and from the Father; therefore he existed before Abraham. From this perspective, 8,58 is just one step away from the self-proclamation of Jesus in 10,30: 'I and the Father are one.' The words of 8,58 are blasphemy in the eyes of the Jews. Their attempt to stone Jesus must be understood from the fact that stoning was the appropriate punishment for blasphemy (Lev24,11–16; 1 Kgs 21,10.13; cf. John 10,31; Acts 7,58). But their attempt fails: Jesus hides himself and leaves the Temple.

2.2. The unity of John 8,31–59: style criticism

From the close reading, John 8,31–59 in its present form appears to be a meaningful whole: shifts of theme, repetitions and apparent contradictions can be explained from the author's reasoning and need not be the result of a process of editing. The purpose of the present section is to investigate whether there is stylistic confirmation of this apparent thematic unity. As announced in the beginning of this chapter, the studies by Schweizer, Ruckstuhl and more recently Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg, provide the basis for this research. One finds another approach to the Johannine style in the extensive commentary by Boismard and Lamouille. Their approach is partly similar to Ruckstuhl's style criticism, partly based on source criticism and redaction criticism. But whereas Ruckstuhl in particular concludes that stylistic ana-

84 Cf. Brown, John, 367; Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 2. 300–310.

lysis confirms the unity of the Fourth Gospel, Boismard and Lamouille draw the opposite conclusion.

In *Ego Eimi*, his study on the *Johannine Bildreden*, Schweizer asks if it is possible to decide for (or against) the Fourth Gospel's unity on stylistic grounds. In order to explore this question, he selects 33 stylistic features which he marks as typically Johannine. The selected features must be small and easily overlooked, and because of their inconspicuous character unlikely to be imitated. Schweizer further states that if the stylistic analysis shows that the features mentioned are evenly spread over the Gospel, one may conclude that the Fourth Gospel is a literary unity. Should they appear in clusters, then we may have evidence that John consists of various sources. But even if specific clusters of features cannot easily be distinguished, we still have to take into account that the final author may have reworded his sources or adapted his own style to the style of the sources that he used. In case we find that the supposed sources are permeated with Johannine style to such an extent that they are virtually indistinguishable, any further investigation into the nature and content of these sources must be regarded as useless.[85] The overall result of Schweizer's subsequent analysis is that there is no stylistic evidence for the assumption that the author of the Fourth Gospel has used different sources.[86]

In the context of this study it would go too far to give full credit to Schweizer's analysis with regard to the whole Fourth Gospel. When limiting ourselves to our pericope, we find that out of his 33 stylistic characteristics mentioned above, Schweizer found nine in our pericope, often more than once. For instance, the Johannine characteristic which Schweizer rated number 1, the possessive pronoun plus article following a noun plus article (e.g. John 8,31 τῷ λογῷ τῷ ἐμῷ), is to be found in our pericope in *vv*31.37.43.56. Feature number 3 of

84 Cf. Brown, *John*, 367; Schnackenburg, Johannesevangelium 2. 300–310.

85 Schweizer, *EGO EIMI*, 87–88.

86 Schweizer, *EGO EIMI*,, 108.

the list, the particle οὖν, is to be found in *vv* 31. 36. 38 (41.52) 57. 59.[87] With regard to our pericope, Schweizer concludes that there is no reason to assume that the text consists of several strata.

Schweizer's approach has been continued and elaborated by Ruckstuhl and Ruckstuhl-Dschulnigg.[88] Focusing on small stylistic characteristics that are typical for the author and easily overlooked by others, and on vocabulary rarely to be found outside John, they distinguish 153 literary characteristics, classified as more (100%) or less purely Johannine in comparison with a) the Synoptics and Acts, b) the entire New Testament, c) Hellenistic writings.[89] In John 8,31–59 we find 28 of these characteristics, spread evenly over the text. Out of the 26 features classified as most typically Johannine (the features marked A) 7 are to be found in John 8,31–59, with a total number of more than twenty occurrences. Out of the B-features 13 are to be found in our pericope, with a number of 17 occurrences; of the 62 C-features, which are the least typically Johannine, 9 occur in John 8,31–59, with a total number of 15 occurrences. Accordingly, our pericope should be classified as typi-

87 Other stylistic features of Schweizer's list in John 8,31-59 are: ἐκεῖνός used as an independent personal pronoun (*v* 52); a noun with article used as an attribute (τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου *v* 44); εἶναι ἐκ...γεννηθῆναι as a qualification of a subject (ἐ)άν (μή) τις (*v* 51); ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ (*v* 42); the separation of words by interjecting εἶναι (δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἁμαρτία, *v* 34); chiasm, in most cases in two parallel equal phrases that form an asyndeton or are connected by καί (*v* 47).

88 That is, with regard to method. But whereas Schweizer leaves open the possibility that the evangelist has used different sources, Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg argue that the Fourth Gospel (and the Johannine letters) is the work of one and the same author. Moreover, in his book *EGO EIMI*, Schweizer only dedicated one chapter to style criticism, as part of a broader study about the ***Bildreden*** in John, whereas Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg concentrate on style.

89 Ruckstuhl-Dschulnigg, ***Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage***, 55–56. A particular stylistic feature can be regarded as 'Johannine' when it responds to the following criteria: a) it should occur at least three times in John; b) it should occur at least twice as often in John as in the Synoptics and Acts; c) it should be spread less widely in the entire NT than in John; d) it should occur more often in John than in any other (Hellenistic) writing. The resulting 153 features are classified A-C, depending on their more or less typically Johannine character (***Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage***, 31–33).

cally Johannine.[90] From the investigation by Ruckstuhl and Dschulnigg, however, it shows that *vv*32.35.36.45.46.50 do not contain any typically Johannine literary features. The absence of typically Johannine stylistic features in *vv*32.35.36 corresponds to the isolated position of the subject of freedom discussed there. But since this theme has been thoroughly incorporated into Johannine reasoning, the question is whether it is useful to attribute it to a secondary source, let alone to try to identify this source. The same is true of *vv*45.46.50, where Johannine stylistic characteristics are absent as well, but the subject matter of the discussion is typically Johannine.[91]

To Boismard and Lamouille, style criticism is part of an entire theory about the genesis of John. On the basis of textual criticism, form and

90 These characteristics are: A.1. οὖν narrativum (John 8,31.41.52.57.59); A.2 ἀπεκρίθω (asyndetically/with οὖν) (αὐτῷ/αὐτοῖς)([ὁ]'Ιησοῦς/another person / substantive or pronoun) introducing direct speech (John 8,34.49.54); A.3 ἀπεκρίθη (asyndetic/with οὖν) καὶ εἶπεν + analogous finite forms) introducing speech; A.4 λέγει/λέγουσιν (only third person present) (asyndetic/with οὖν) + object in dative + subject of the phrase (John 8,39); A.7 asyndeton epicum (John 8,33.37.39.48.54); A.11 possessive pronoun with article after the noun (John 8,31.34.37.43.43); A.26 noun with article, without additions, used as an attribute (John 8,44, τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου); B.1 ἐκεῖνος/ἐκείνη as personal singular, standing on its own, without article nor used as an attribute (John 8,42); B.11 ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι (John 8,54); B.19 ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ/ἀπὸ σεαυτοῦ/ἀφ ἐμαυτοῦ (John 8,42); B.20 οὐ μὴ...εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (John 8,51.52); B.22 ζητέω ἀποκτεῖναι (John 8,37.40); B.24 εἰ... νῦν δέ (John 8,39); B.31 λελάληκα ὑμῖν (speech by Jesus) (John 8,40); B.32 ἐγώ and ὑμεῖς in relation to each other (John 8,49); B.38 δαιμόνιον ἔχω said about Jesus (John 8,48.49.52); B.44 λαλέω ἐκ (John 8,44); B.45 ὃν (...) ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι (John 8,54); B.51 πῶς σὺ λέγεις (John8,33); B.61 πώποτε with negation (John8,33); C.50 οὔπω (8,57); C.19 ἐάν (μή) τις (τις always before the verb or auxiliary verb) (John 8,51.52); C.21 σύ after a verb (John 8,49); C.22. εἰμὶ/γίνομαι μαθητής (John 8,31); C.26. τηρέω τὸν λόγον (singular) (John 8,51.52.55); C.27 ποιέω + reflexive pronoun in accusative + attribute (John 8,53); C.44 εἶναι ἐκ in the metaphorical sense/γεννηθῆναι ἐκ (John 8,41.44.47.47); C.45 ἀμὴν ἀμήν (John 8,51.58) (***Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage***, 186–187).

91 *Vv* 45.46 are about truth and belief, both themes that are being dealt with elsewhere in John; the same goes for *v* 50, which is about glory and judgment.

redaction criticism, style criticism and theological criteria,[92] they distinguish between four strata, labelled Document C, John II-A, John II-B and John III. Apart from Document C, each of these documents continues the previous one(s). All strata have their particular theological outlook and literary style, although the stylistic resemblance between John II-A and II-B is particularly strong, since they are from the hand of one and the same author.[93] Boismard and Lamouille give complete reconstructions of Document C, John II-A and II-B; we will describe the parts of these reconstructions that are relevant to John 8,31–59. In Document C our pericope is virtually non-existent: only the last phrase of John 8,59 ('[Jesus] went out of the Temple') occurs in this document.[94] In John II-A, we find a long 'dialogue with the Jews', which consists of several sections. One of these sections is a 'dialogue with Jesus', consisting of John 8,14.15.54.55.42.20.21.22.23.24, followed by the story of the cleansing of the Temple, a discussion about Jesus being Bread of Life and Living Water, and a discussion titled 'the Jews are from the devil' which comprises John 8,25.26.43.40.41.42.44.46.47.48 and *v*59 minus the phrase quoted above. After 'the Jews are from the devil', comes a fragment called 'the Greek want to see Jesus', followed by the story of the healing of the blind man (cf. John 9), and concluded with the phrase '[Jesus] went out of the Temple' (presently John 8,59).[95] John II-B is a reworking of II-A by the same author. In John II-B, the sequence 7,37–39 plus 8,30 is followed by the first part of our present pericope, John 8,31–39 ('Jesus makes free') and 8,44–59 ('the Jews are from the devil'), with the exemption of 8,46b–47.54b–55.[96] The pericope in its present form is the work of John III, whose own influence shows in the remark οἱ προφῆται/οἱ προφῆται ἀπέθανον (vv52c.53c), and in the insertion

92 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 11–16.
93 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 17.
94 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 27–28.
95 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 37.
96 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 233.

of *vv*54–55 (originally John II-A's) into its present context. Our present pericope results from a mixing and shifting of verses and elements. John 8,31–36 should be attributed to John II-B,[97] while 8,37–47 is an amalgam, John III's elaboration of sections of John II-A and John II-B.[98] John 8,48–59 is primarily the work of John II-B (*vv*48bc–49.54a.56–58); the John II-A strain consists of *v*48a, the accusation that Jesus is a Samaritan in 48b, and 59 except the remark about Jesus leaving the Temple. In their treatment of *v*59, Boismard-Lamouille turn the usual surmises of redaction criticism upside down: instead of considering the last phrase of *v*59b an editorial insertion, they consider it to be the foundation on which *vv*48b–58 has been built.

As said before, stylistic evidence is one of the basic criteria for the Boismard and Lamouille-theory about the genesis of the Fourth Gospel. In the appendix of their commentary on John, Boismard and Lamouille have a list of more than four hundred stylistic features, which are qualified according to their frequency in the Fourth Gospel compared to other New Testament writings except the Apocalypse (classification A-C), and Synoptics-Acts (classification D-F).[99] Their criteria for selecting Johannine stylistic characteristics are less strict than those of Schweizer and Ruckstuhl-Dschulnigg. Apart from small, inimitable literary traits (e.g. A.1, possessive pronoun plus article following a noun plus article) and examples of typical but inconspicuous vocabulary, Boismard and Lamouille include theological terms (e.g. A.77, ἐγὼ εἰμί as an invocation of the divine Name), proper names

97 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 233–234.

98 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 233–234.

99 Boismard-Lamouille, *Jean*, 491–514. The classification runs from A (100% occurrences in John) to C (50–74% occurrences in John) for John in comparison with the other New Testament writings, and from D (100% in John) to F (50–74% in John) for John in comparison with the Synoptics and Acts. The A-features number over 160, B over hundred, C over eighty, D under ten, E about fifteen, and F about forty. For a thorough criticism of the views of Boismard on the genesis of John, see Neirynck et al., *Jean et les Synoptiques. Examen critique de l'exégèse de M.-É. Boismard* (BETL 49; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979).

(e.g. A.81, Judas Iscariot), and various marked expressions (e.g. A.110, 'a festival of the Jews', A.147, 'the house of my Father') into their list, characteristics that are easily taken over by another author or redactor. Moreover, when observing the list of stylistic features one is struck by the fact that over two hundred of them occur in two strata or more, especially in John II-A+II-B. The only stratum that has a substantial number (i.e. hundred) of stylistic characteristics of its own is John II-B. The number of features found in John C and John II-A respectively are less than ten.[100] The general impression is therefore that the four strata-theory advocated by Boismard and Lamouille cannot be proven conclusively from the stylistic criteria they propose. The conclusion lies at hand that this is also true of their treatment of our pericope.

As we have seen, according to Boismard and Lamouille John 8,31–36 should be attributed to John II-B; 8,37–47 is an elaboration of sections of John II-A and John II-B by John III, whereas John 8,48–59 is primarily a composition of John II-B. The John II-A fragment in this part of the pericope consists of *vv*48ab and *v*59 minus 'and went out of the Temple'. The latter remark should be attributed to Document C. Since Boismard and Lamouille came to these reconstructions partly on the basis of the analysis of the literary style of John, one expects the stratification of our pericope to be reflected by its stylistic particularities. Out of the Boismard-Lamouille list of Johannine stylistic characteristics, 72 are to be found in John 8,31–59.[101] Only 13 of them belong exclusively to one layer of the composition, all but one to John II-B.[102] With regard to the Boismard-Lamouille composition theory, the pre-

100 Boismard-Lamouille, ***Jean***, 63–64 give the following for John C: A.130 ὑδρία; A.134 ἀνθρακία; A.147 'house of my Father'; A.155 φανεροῦν ἐμαυτόν; C.23 πρὸς ἐμαυτόν; A.88 μετὰ τοῦτο; A.114 ἐν κρυπτῷ without particle; B.67 ὀθόνιον; B.69 κραυγαζεῖν.

101 Because of this large number of characteristics, we have chosen not to enumerate them all, but refer to those relevant for our argument.

102 The John II-B features to be found in John 8,31–59 are A.15 οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν (John 8,44); A.44 ἐγὼ... καὶ ὑμεῖς (John 8,38); A.45 εἶπεν/εἶπον (***continued on next page***)

dominant contribution by John II-B is reflected in the fact that typical John II-B features occur more or less throughout the pericope: in 8,31. 32.33.34.38.44.48.49.50.52.53.54.57.58. However, the number of stylistic features that are attributed to two strata or more exceeds by far the one-stratum features. In *vv* 31–36 for instance, a fragment attributed to John II-B, the three exclusively John II-B features (B.15 μένω ἐν *v* 31; A.138 'to know the truth' *v* 32; E.6 ἁμαρτία singular *v* 33.34) are outnumbered by the 13 other characteristics, six of which occur in John II–A+IIB, the others in two or more other strata. In John 8,37–47, the elaboration by John III of John II-A+II-B, we find 39 different stylistic features, four of which are typically John II-B (A.44 ἐγὼ... καὶ ὑμεῖς *v* 38; A.15 οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν *v* 44; οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν *v* 44; C.29 τα ἰδία *v* 44), one typically John II-A (ἀνθρωποκτόνος, *v* 44), the other ones belonging to two or more strata, predominantly John II-A+II-B (16 times), II-A+II-B+III (about twenty times), Document C-II (six times) and Document C+II-A+II-B (seven times). The contribution of John III is rather small. The fact that most stylistic characteristics belong to more than one stratum, and that the only one-stratum features belong to John II-A and/or John II-B, but not to John III, makes the role of John III rather doubtful. In general one may say that the stylistic evidence does not support the assumption of Boismard-Lamouille with regard to John 8,31–47, but does not undermine it either. The same is true of the results of their stylistic analysis of John 8,48–59. In John 8,48–59, out of 26 different stylistic features six are typical for John II-B: C.10 δαιμόνιον ἔχειν (John 8,48.49.52); C.28 δόξαν ζητῶ (of

οὖν πρὸς αὐτόν (John 8,57); A.71 ποιέω σεαυτόν (John 8,53); A.77 ἐγὼ εἰμί for the divine name (John 8,58); A.138 'to know the truth' (John 8,32); B.15 μένω ἐν (John 8,31); B.48 ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι (John 8,54); C.10 δαιμόνιον ἔχειν (John 8,48.49.52); C.28 δόξαν ζητῶ (Jesus) (John 8,50); C.29 τα ἰδία (John 8,44); E.6 ἁμαρτία singular (John 8,33.34). The only exclusively II-A feature is A.135 ἀνθρωποκτόνος (John 8,44).

103 The question is if A.77 ἐγὼ εἰμί for the divine name can be regarded as a purely stylistic feature.

Jesus; *v*50); A.71 ποιέω σεαυτόν (*v*53); B.48 ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι (*v*54); A.45 εἶπεν/εἶπον οὖν πρὸς αὐτόν (*v*57); A.77 ἐγὼ εἰμί for the divine name (*v*58).[103] Other stylistic features from the Boismard-Lamouille list to be found here all occur in more than one stratum, most of them in John II-A+II-B. Given the fact that specific stylistic features attributed to John II-B, are so scarce compared to the number of stylistic features attributed to John II-A + II-B or other combinations of strata, the question arises if this distinction is really useful or necessary. The surmise that John 8,31–59 in its present form is the result of a process of collecting and editing may be correct, but the problem is that we cannot prove on stylistic grounds that this process took place in the way Boismard and Lamouille propose. The attribution of parts of our pericope to particular authors or editor(s) is too uncertain to use as a basis for the investigation of the historical background of John 8,31–59.

2.3. The unity of John 8,31–59: source criticism and redaction criticism

The close reading of John 8,31–59 in section 1 of this chapter showed that the present text of our pericope can be read as a meaningful whole. In their studies about John, Schweizer and Ruckstuhl-Dschulnigg demonstrated that from the stylistic perspective our pericope appears to be a unity as well, and that, even if our pericope were composed from various sources, it would be impossible to identify these sources. With their alternative stylistic approach Boismard and Lamouille meant to demonstrate the possibility of identifying sources on stylistic grounds; however, with regard to John 8,31–59 their results proved unconvincing. Their theory is basically an example of redaction criticism, which method shall be discussed in this section. Here we will investigate whether source criticism and redaction criticism seriously question the results obtained so far. On the following pages we shall discuss

the implications of the *Grundschrift*-theory of Wellhausen, Bultmann's source theory and the theories of multiple redaction by Brown and Lindars as far as John 8,31–59 is concerned.

Wellhausen distinguishes between a *Grundschrift* by the evangelist and additions by a redactor.[104] John 8,38–40.44.59 is a fragment of the *Grundschrift* which was originally continued in 10,40. It consisted of a) a discussion about the identity of the father of the Jews, and b) their reaction to the outcome of this discussion (*v* 59). Its pivot was that not Abraham, but Cain was the father of the Jews (*v* 44). The redactor extended the original discussion and gave it a more radical character. To *vv* 38–40 he added *vv* 30–37, an ambiguous fragment since it is addressed partly to the disciples (the *Jüngerrede* in *vv* 31–32.34–35.36), partly to the adversaries (*vv* 33.37).[105] He also added *vv* 41–43, a repetition meant to correct *vv* 38–40,[106] and *vv* 45–58. Thus it was the redactor's doing that the relationship between Abraham and Jesus became the topic of the discourse, which was not the case in the original *Grundschrift*.[107]

Like any other reconstruction of a *Grundschrift* or other source, Wellhausen's proposal is inevitably hypothetical, based on alleged ruptures and inconsistencies in the extant text. With regard to John 8,31–59, however, one must seriously question whether there is any ground for Wellhausen's assumptions. To begin with, his proposal to distinguish between *vv* 33.37 and *vv* 38–40 overlooks the thematic consistency of

104 Wellhausen, *Evangelium Johannis*, 100–102.

105 Wellhausen, *Evangelium Johannis*, 41–42. Wellhausen considers *v* 36 a problem because there 'the Son' designates Jesus, and is obviously a 'misinterpretation' of *vv* 34–35. However, since *v* 36 is addressed to the disciples it belongs to the Jüngerrede. The entire passage *vv* 30–37 should be regarded as 'eine seine Zusammenhang unterbrechende Erweiterung.'

106 Wellhausen, *Evangelium Johannis*, 42. *Vv* 41–43 were added because the editor felt that it cannot be denied that Abraham is the father of the Jews; therefore he focused on God instead of Abraham.

107 Wellhausen, *Evangelium Johannis*, 41–42.

these verses, which are all about the relationship between the Jews and Abraham. The repetition of *vv* 38–40 in *vv* 41–43 need not indicate that we are dealing with a later stratum in the text, as Wellhausen suggests, since repetition may have been a literary device employed by the author to emphasize or modify his arguments.[108] Yet another problem is that Wellhausen sees *v* 44 as the pivot of our pericope, whereas the text suggests something different: the Jews take offence at the self-assertion of Jesus as God's son and envoy in the first place, and not, or at least not primarily, at his definition of themselves as children of the devil (or Cain, according to Wellhausen). The climax of our pericope occurs at the end, in the proclamation of the pre-existence of Jesus and the subsequent reaction of the Jews.[109]

According to Bultmann, the Gospel of John is the result of a complicated process of creation. The evangelist used different sources: a) an originally Gnostic source with strong Aramaic features, consisting of *Offenbarungsreden* or revelatory discourses; b) a *semeia* or signs source, written in Greek with Semitic traits; c) a passion and resurrection story, related to a source used by the Synoptics, but not identical with it, and d) various other sources. The evangelist combined and revised these sources and turned them into a new literary work, which he stamped with his own style and theology. But the evangelist's creation became disarrayed and was passed, in distorted form, into the hands of an ecclesiastical redactor. This redactor restored the gospel according to his own insights and inserted fragments of a more orthodox eschatological and sacramental character. Later still, glosses were added to this gospel. In his commentary on John, Bultmann tries to reconstruct

108 With regard to Wellhausen's approach to vv 38–40.41–43, one should also consider another problem. According to Wellhausen, the redactor, who inserted *vv* 41–43, obviously thought that the Jews were children of Abraham indeed. If so, why then did he not delete or change *vv* 38–40, where it is suggested that they are not?

109 Cf. John 10,30–31 and 10,32–38.39.

what he regards as the evangelist's original work, relying on stylistic evidence and content, context; his second purpose is to reconstruct the underlying sources of the original gospel.

Bultmann sees John 8,31–59 as a combination of scattered fragments from the whole of the evangelist's work. The redactor put these pieces together and turned them into a new composition. Originally 8,[30]31–40 was a speech to believers.[110] 8,41–47.51–53.56–59 were addressed to adversaries and consisted of a speech about the *Teufelskindschaft* of the Jews (8,41–47.51) and a fragment about Jesus and Abraham (8,52–53.56–59). [111] 8,48–49.50.54–55 belonged to a longer speech about the concealment of revelation.[112] The evangelist took what is now 8,31b–32.34–35.38; 50.54–55; 42–45.51 from the revelatory discourse source.

Bultmann's reconstruction of the original gospel is even more speculative than Wellhausen's proposal. Although Bultmann uses stylistic evidence to support his assumptions, he – like Wellhausen – tends to regard shifts of theme, repetitions and contradictions in the text as unsuccessful attempts of the redactor to combine the scattered fragments of the original gospel. His treatment of *v*40 and *v*41 is illustrative: despite the fact that in the present version of the Fourth Gospel *v*41a results from the reasoning of *vv*38–40, Bultmann attributes *v*40 and *v*41 to different discourses, and states that the text originally preceding *v*41 has been lost.[113] Another example of Bultmann's efforts to correct the editor's work is his proposal to take out *vv*48–50 from between 8,41–47.51 and 8,52–53.56–59. The proposed removal has the unfortunate effect of breaking up the present connection between *v*48 and *v*52. In the present form *v*52 functions as the confirmation of *v*48, and enables the opponents to continue their arguments against Jesus. The outcome of Bultmann's reconstruction of John 8,31–59 seems to

110 Bultmann, *Johannes*, 332–339.
111 Bultmann, *Johannes*, 246–249.
112 Bultmann, *Johannes*, 225–227.
113 Bultmann, *Johannes*, 238.

weaken rather than strengthen his reasoning about the revelation of the divine envoy.

Brown and Lindars explain the discrepancy between the unity of theology, style, and diction of the Fourth Gospel on the one hand, and its disruptions and diversity of genres on the other hand as the result of multiple redaction. According to Brown, the development of the Fourth Gospel took place in five stages. In the first stage there was a body of traditional material about the words and works of Jesus independent of, but similar to, the synoptic tradition. In the second stage this material was shaped into longer discourses displaying stylistic features such as misunderstanding and irony. Preaching and teaching probably helped to develop these patterns. The entire process took place within one particular school whose most prominent figure was the evangelist, a disciple of John the son of Zebedee. The evangelist was responsible for shaping the first edition of Johannine traditions into a gospel, which marked the third phase of the process. However, this gospel did not include all of the evangelist's material. In the fourth phase the evangelist undertook a second edition of his work, in response to the changing needs of the community. Eventually another person, a disciple of the evangelist, included Johannine material that had not been used into his predecessor's work. This was the third and last edition of the Fourth Gospel.[114]

Brown is not very explicit about the place of John 8,31–59 in the development described above. His solution with regard to *v*31 has already been outlined in *chapter* 1 of this study; the only other verse he considers to be a disruption of the unity of our pericope is *v*35, which he describes as a 'parenthetical insertion' that was introduced because of *vv*34.36. The problem with Brown's reconstruction is that since *v*35 is the hinge between *v*34 and *v*36, it can hardly be regarded as a later insertion. Moreover, Brown does not make clear who was respon-

114 Brown, *John*, I. XXXIV-XXXVI.

sible for the interpolation,[115] nor does he specify in which stage of the gospel's genesis the 'homogeneous discourse'[116] of John 8,31–59 should be situated.[117]

Like Brown, Lindars distinguishes five stages in the creation of the Fourth Gospel. Initially, the evangelist elaborated several separate traditions (e.g. narratives about miracles and a passion narrative). These traditions lost their original form in the process of rewriting.[118] In the second stage, the evangelist used this rewritten material for sermons, which were to become the basis of his gospel. The homilies in question were composed during the period of debate with the synagogue, 80–90 C.E., and were meant for the evangelist's community.[119] In the third stage, the evangelist became acquainted with the Gospel of Mark, and took over the gospel genre for reshaping his sermons of the previous phase into the first edition of his work. In the fourth stage he revised his work in order to encourage faithful discipleship, which had become a problem in his community because of increasing pressure from the synagogue. During this period he added several passages, e.g. the Prologue. In the fifth and final stage the Fourth Gospel was completed by inserting some 'post-Johannine' additions, e.g. chapter 21.[120]

John 8,31–59 is one of the homilies created by the evangelist during phase two.[121] There are only a few verses stemming from an earlier or later period: the remark in *v* 31 that the Jews 'believed him' is a 'harmonizing addition',[122] whereas the 'parable' of *v* 35 and the saying of

115 Brown, *John*, I. 355–356.

116 Brown, *John*, I. 361.

117 Most probably the fourth stage, i.e. the second edition.

118 Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1971), 38–41.

119 Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel*, 43–60.

120 Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel*, 62–78.

121 See for the complete analysis of John 8,31–59, Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel*, 43–47.

122 About the words τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους (*v* 31a) Lindars (*Behind the Fourth Gospel*, 80. n. 1) remarks that 'though they are found in all manuscripts, they cannot be right, as the subsequent dialogue shows' [sic!].

*v*51 are traditional; the solemn amen-formulae introducing *v*34 and *v*51 are a Johannine addition. In *v*34bc, the preface to the traditional saying in *v*35, the evangelist already elaborated one aspect of the latter, the theme of slavery. *V*35 serves as a prelude to the issue of the Son and his identity that will be the discussed more explicitly in the second part of our pericope.[123] *V*48 constitutes a break in the argument. After this, John elaborates another aspect of the parable of *v*35, i.e. the topic of permanence (cf. *vv*51–53). He continues to give Abraham a role in his argument, which eventually leads to the amen-saying in *v*58, probably the evangelist's own creation.

Lindars' concept of the literary genesis of the Fourth Gospel raises the same fundamental question as other concepts of this kind: does the text provide convincing support for the hypothesis? In Lindars' view our pericope is homogeneous, with the exception of the traditional sayings of *vv*35.51. But Lindars does not explain why *vv*35.51 should be regarded as traditional sayings, let alone where they come from. Valuable aspects of Lindars' observations are the emphasis on the literary method of the author, and the appreciation of John's distinct theology and style. Lindars compares John's way of reasoning with a spiral staircase[124] bringing the reader back to the same point

123 John 8,35 is the subject of Lindars' article 'Slave and Son in John 8:31–36', *The New Testament Age. Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke* (2 vols.; ed. W. C. Weinrich; Macon, GA: Mercer, 1984), 1. 271–28; reprinted in Lindars, *Essays on John* (1992). In this article Lindars seeks to reconstruct the original parable which was at the basis of John 8,35 (pp. 275–279), and afterwards analyses the way in which John used this tradition (pp. 279–284). The original form of the parable or proverb may have been 'the slave is not free in the house, the son is free.' Since the issue of freedom and slavery is unusual in John, its presence in 8,31–36 can only be explained by the use of an external tradition, i.e. the parable of *v* 35, which John took as his point of departure. John changed the original logion to emphasize the preexistence of Jesus. The entire pericope shows a duality between God and the Son, who are associated with truth and life, and the devil, who represents falsehood and death. The logion suited this duality, and John adapted it in order to bring it even more in line with his own views.

or argument again and again, but each time at a higher level.[125] In our pericope this model becomes particularly clear in the discussions about the identity of the Jews and the power of Jesus over life and death. The christological pivot of 8,58 is based on the arguments of Jesus' opponents of *vv* 53.57, to which the evangelist gives his own turn and then takes them to another level, the level of what is generally called 'high' christology.

2.4. Conclusions

In the introduction of the present chapter we have pointed out the significance of close reading and literary criticism for the purpose of this study, i.e. to describe the role of Abraham in the conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish environment. One of our assumptions was that the literary genesis of the text might reflect the circumstances in which it was written, composed and edited. However, both close reading of the text itself and study of secondary literature on historal-critical and stylistic analyses of the text proved this assumption to be improbable. This leaves us with the second option, namely that the development of the argument within the debate of John 8,31–59 itself may be an indication of the development of the conflict between the Johannine group and its Jewish opponents. The problem with this assumption is that a narrative approach alone does not suffice to explain all difficulties in the text of John 8,31–59, in particular those with regard to the picture of Abraham. Therefore a thorough investigation into the relevant traditions about Abraham is essential. This investigation will be undertaken in the following chapter.

124 Lindars, 'Traditions behind the Fourth Gospel', *L'Évangile de Jean. Sources, rédaction, théologie* (ed. M. de Jonge; Leuven/Gembloux: University Press/Duculot, 1977) 107–124, p. 121; reprinted in *Essays*.

125 Cf. *v* 39ab, and the reaction in *vv* 39c–41a; *v* 41b-d, and the reaction in *vv* 42b–47; *v* 48d and the reaction in *vv* 49–51; *vv* 52–53 and the reaction in *vv* 54–58.

3

IMAGES OF ABRAHAM, RELEVANT FOR JOHN 8,31–59, IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, EARLY JEWISH LITERATURE & THE NEW TESTAMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to collect traditions about Abraham which are relevant for the understanding of John 8,31–59.[126] As we have seen, in John 8,31–59 both Jesus and his opponents call upon Abraham in order to strengthen their arguments. In the first part of the discussion Abraham is pictured successively as the father of the Jews (*vv*33.37–41), their guarantee for freedom (*vv*33–36), and the man who performs good deeds (*vv*39–41). In the second part of the dialogue (*vv*48–58) Abraham is a witness to the pre-existence of Jesus. He is mentioned together with the prophets as an authority in the history of Israel, a man with a special relationship to God (*vv*52–53), but, like them, a mortal human being (*vv*52–53), in contrast with the pre-existent Son. He is a visionary rejoicing in his vision (*v*56).

It is not our intention in this chapter to decide which traditions actually have contributed to John's understanding of Abraham; that

126 A complete survey of images of Abraham in the Old Testament, New Testament and early Jewish literature lies beyond the scope of this study; see therefore for instance R. Martin-Achard-K. Berger-R. P. Schmitz, 'Abraham,' *TRE* 1. 364–365; L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia 1909–1983), I. (11th ed.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961) 182–308; V. (7th ed.; ibidem, 1958) 207–269; J.L. Lord, 'Abraham. A Study in Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation' (Diss. Duke University, 1968); S. Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism. A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Early Jewish Literature* (New York: KTAV, 1971); F.E. Wieser, *Die Abrahamvorstellungen im Neuen Testament* (EHS, Reihe 23, Bdf. 317; Bern [etc.]: Lang, 1987); Siker, *Disinheriting*. For a discussion of Abraham's journey to Canaan and the trials of Abraham see J.L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997) 131–48 and 163–178.

question will be dealt with in chapter 4. Because of the variety and abundance of traditions about Abraham at the end of the first century C.E. on the one hand, and the character of the Johannine picture of Abraham on the other hand, it is important to make an appropriate selection of the material available. We have restricted our investigation to literary sources and traditions dealing with aspects of the figure of Abraham which are also to be found in John. This approach has the disadvantage of moving away from the objectives of these sources themselves. For instance, a mere description of elements of Philo's portrayal of Abraham which also appear in John does not give a coherent picture of all Philo has to say about Abraham. And the above mentioned aspects or 'roles' of Abraham in John may have quite different meanings in the context of other writings. Nevertheless, in a search for the Abraham traditions that may be behind John 8,31–59, the imposed restriction is simply necessary.

The aspects of the Johannine Abraham pointed out above are to be discussed in the following sections: Abraham as the father of the Jews and the Jews as 'seed' of Abraham (section 1); Abraham as man of faith, especially in his performing good deeds (section 2); Abraham as a guarantee for freedom (section 3); as a seer (of the last things) (section 4); a man of joy (section 5) and a mortal human being (section 6).

127 The references to Abraham relevant for John 8,31–59 presented below have been found in the following ways: by checking indices and footnotes in secondary literature (the article by Martin-Achard, monographs by Sandmel, Siker and Wieser); by checking the lemma 'Abraham' in the concordances to the Hebrew Old Testament and New Testament by Lisowsky and Moulton respectively, the Philo index of Borgen et al., Rengstorf's concordance on Flavius Josephus and A.-M. Denis's concordance on the Greek pseudepigrapha. We have further consulted the index of *OTP* 2 and the indices of various volumes of JSHRZ. For rabbinic literature we rely on the articles and monographs mentioned above, as well as on Haiman on Genesis 15, 17, 18 and 22 and minor passages. I would like to thank Lieve Teugels (formerly Faculty of Theology at the University of Utrecht), who helped me in consulting the CDROM of Davka on rabbinic literature. For the complete bibliographic information about the instruments mentioned above I refer to the bibliography and (*see next pag*)

The principal sources[127] on which we rely are the Old Testament, early Jewish writings[128] (the Apocrypha and most Pseudepigrapha, the writings of Qumran, Philo and Flavius Josephus) and the New Testament. Judaism in the first century C.E. was quite varied, which is reflected in the variety of sources that are all captured under the designation 'early Jewish writings'. Consequently we find very different and sometimes even conflicting ways of seeing Abraham in this period. The first century C.E. also saw the birth of what was to become rabbinic Judaism. Although this study is not the place to start a fundamental and methodological discussion about the question if and how rabbinic writings should be used as a source of information for New Testament exegesis, we refer to sources from the Tannaitic and Amoraic period, since many rabbinic collections contain material and express traditions which are much older than the date of their final redaction would suggest. These sources will be primarily used with reference to earlier literature, especially when they illustrate images of Abraham which were current around 100 C.E.[129] Because they contain material from various

list of abbreviations. As far as we can see the collection of relevant references to Abraham from the Old Testament and the New Testament is complete; we have tried to give a survey of these references in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and related literature, as well as Philo and Josephus, that is as complete as possible, but we do not claim it to be exhaustive. As for rabbinic literature, and even more so for patristic literature, we have aimed at giving a reliable impression of certain aspects of the images of Abraham in these collections.

128 We follow G. Stemberger's use of the term 'early Judaism' (*Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur. Eine Einführung* [München: Beck, 1977], 26): 'Christliche Autoren nennen die Jahrhunderte nach dem Abschluß der hebräischen Bibel gerne die 'zwischentestamentliche' Zeit, ebenso die in ihr entstandene Literatur: man sieht darin also die Brücke zwischen Altem und Neuem Testament. Der oft verwendete Ausdruck 'Spätjudentum' soll diese Periode als eine Zeit der Dekadenz nach der großen biblischen Zeit kennzeichnen. Richtiger sprechen wir von 'Frühjudentum', insofern die drie Jahrhunderte von ca. 200 v. bis 100 n. Chr. nicht Ende einer Geschichte, sondern Grundlegung einer Entwicklung sind, die zum rabbinischen Judentum führt.'

129 Cf. the tradition about the fiery furnace in *Bib. Ant.* 6, which has been reinterpreted in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 11,28 and *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 38.13; see section 3.2.1 of this chapter.

periods, the dating of the Targumim, the halakic midrashim (*Mekilta, Sipra* and *Sipre*), *Tosepta* and *Talmudim* is a complex issue, which makes it difficult to decide to what extent they can help to explain John 8. As to early Christian sources like the Apostolic Fathers, references will be even more limited, taking into account that they are dealing with discussions within Christian communities whose distance to their house of origin, Judaism, has become considerable. Moreover, at closer investigation Johannine-like interpretations of Abraham occurring in these sources often turned out to be reflections *of* John instead of parallels *to* John.

3.1. Abraham as the father of the Jews; the Jews as Abraham's offspring

'Das jüdische Bekenntnis zu Abraham zielt auf das Faktum der Erwählung: In Abraham ist seine leibliche Nachkommenschaft zum *Gottesvolk* erwählt.'[130] In Genesis 18,19 we find that the descendants of Abraham are referred to as 'his sons' or 'his children'. However, in Jewish traditions both before and after John, 'seed of Abraham' is the designation of the Jewish people and its members *par excellence*. The term 'seed of Abraham' implies their election as God's people. God has elected Israel, Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob. Old Testament references to Abraham's seed and Abraham as 'father' point almost exclusively to Israel. In the three Old Testament instances where the term 'seed of Abraham' (זרע אברהם) proper occurs, descent and election go hand in hand;[131] the same is true of references to Abraham's

130 Wieser, *Abrahamvorstellungen*, 154.

131 Isa 41,8, Ps 105,6 and 2 Chr 20,7. In Isa 41,8 Israel/Jacob is called 'seed of Abraham, my friend' (literally: 'Abraham who loved me') in the context of God's assurance that he will be with his people and strengthen and help them. Cf. Jer 33,26, where 'seed' is used in connection with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the context of God's promise to restore the house of David.

'seed' which do not have the name Abraham immediately attached to it, such as 'your seed',[132] and of passages where Abraham is said to be the *father* of Israel.[133] In Isa 63,16 the connection is broken up: by confessing that Abraham does not recognize them anymore as his offspring, Israel suggests that the foundation for their election has been swept away.[134]

The Old Testament interpretation of 'seed of Abraham'[135] as a designation of Israel continues in early Jewish literary sources, both Palestinian and Hellenistic. In *Bib. Ant.* 18,5, God tells Balaam that the people whom he is asked to curse is the people that He has spoken of to Abraham: 'Your seed will be like the stars of the heaven' (Gen 22,17).[136] The *Book of Jubilees*[137] focuses on the election of Jacob. Of

132 Gen 12,7; 13,15-16; 15,5.13.18; 17,7–10.12; 21,12; 22,17–18; 24,7; Josh 24,3; Neh 9,8. The only exception is Gen 21,13, where 'seed' in the sense of 'Abraham's offspring' does not designate Israel, but Ishmael: "And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your seed." Other Old Testament instances where Abraham and his 'seed' concur are about the offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: Exod 32,13; 33,1; Deut 1,8; 34,4, Jer 33,26. Cf. for references to 'the fathers' and their 'seed' e.g. Deut 10,15; 11,9.

133 See e.g. Josh 24,3; Isa 51,2; cf. Isa 63,16. In Gen 26,3.24 Abraham occurs as the father of Isaac; in Gen 32,10 and 48,15.16 he and Isaac occur as father of Jacob. The only exception to the exclusiveness of Abraham as the father of Israel is Gen 17,3.4, where Abraham is said to become the father of 'many nations'. See for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the 'fathers' of Israel: Exod 3,6.15–16; 4,5; Deut 1,8; 6,10; 9,5; 29,12; 30,20; 1 Chr 29,18; in Mic 7,20 Abraham and Jacob. Tob 4,12 considers Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be Israel's forefathers.

134 Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, *'Abraham weet van ons niet' (Jesaja 63:16). De grond van Israëls vertrouwen tijdens de ballingschap* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1986), especially pp. 10–11. In Isaiah 63, God is pictured as the Redeemer of Israel.

135 In the Old Testament, the term 'son of Abraham' is used for Isaac (Gen 25,19) and Ishmael (16,15; 21,11; 25,12; 28,9) alike; they are also mentioned together as 'the sons' of Abraham (Gen 25,9; 1 Chron 1,28).

136 According to D.J. Harrington ("Pseudo-Philo", *OTP* 2.299) Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities was probably composed before 70 C.E., with 135 B.C.E. as the earliest possible date.

137 Scholars generally agree that *Jubilees* has been written as a reaction against the Hellenistic reform of 168 B.C.E. and that it stems from (*continued on next page*)

Abraham's sons only Jacob shall be a holy seed, a kingdom of priests and a holy people (16,17–18, with reference to Exod 19,6). Ishmael, his sons and brothers, and Esau are rejected: in the passage about Abraham's circumcision in Jubilees 15, God says he will not draw them near to himself, because He knew them (15,30). Like the other nations, the descendants of Ishmael and Esau are ruled by spirits, only Jacob's descendants are ruled by God (15,31–32). In *Jubilees*, Jacob is Israel's forefather par excellence: Abraham loves and blesses him (*Jub.* 19,16–29; 22,10–30), and calls him his son (e.g. 22,10.11); when Abraham dies Jacob is lying at his bosom (23,1–3). The house of Abraham is given to Jacob and his offspring, who will build it, raise Abraham's name before God and remain in the house forever (22,24). The pre-eminence of Jacob occurs in other sources as well. 3 Macc 6,3[138] for example identifies 'seed of Abraham' with 'children of Jacob whom you sanctified', while both 4 Ezra 3,15–16 and Jubilees emphasize the election of Jacob by setting it off against the rejection of Esau.[139] According to *Ps. Sol.* 9,9, the seed of Abraham (= the house of Israel, 9,11) has been chosen above the nations; *Ps. Sol.* 18,3 even calls

about this period. However, opinions about the exact date of the work vary; cf. J.C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (HSM 14; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 231 and *The Book of Jubilees* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 17-21; G.W.E. Nickelsburg, 'The Bibel Rewritten and Expanded,' *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. M.E. Stone; CRINT II/2; Assen-Philadelphia: Van Gorcum-Fortress Press, 1984), 101–104; K. Berger, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* (JSHRZ II/3; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1981), 299–300; O.S. Wintermute, 'Jubilees,' *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J.H. Charlesworth; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983–1985), 2.43–44.

138 3 Maccabees was probably written in the first century B.C.E.; cf. Nickelsburg, 'Stories of Biblical and Early Post- Biblical Times,' *Jewish Writings* (CRINT II/2), 83, and H. Anderson, '3 Maccabees,' *OTP* 2. 512.

139 4 Ezra was probably written shortly after 70 C.E.; cf. Stone, 'Apocalyptic Literature,' *Jewish Writings* (CRINT II/2), 412; J. Schreiner, *Das 4. Buch Esra* (JSHRZ V/4; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1981), 302; B.M. Metzger, 'The Fourth Book of Ezra,' *OTP* 1. 520.

Abraham – anachronistically – an Israelite.[140] In 4 Maccabees 'children of Abraham' and related designations occur repeatedly in the context of passages about dedication to the Law, the main issue of the book and considered the only source of true virtue. According to 4 Macc 18,1, the descendants of Abraham are admonished to obey the Law and to be true to their religion;[141] therefore 6,17–22 says that children (παῖδες) of Abraham cling to the Law, even if it means that they will be put to death. Consequently, in 9,21 one of Eleazar's sons, 'a true son of Abraham', remains steadfast and even under heavy torture does not utter a moan. The mother of the seven martyrs is called a 'daughter of Abraham'(15,28). Like Abraham (16,20), she does not waver when put to the test of sacrificing her children for God; even her love for her children does not keep her from remaining in this way steadfast in her faith (15,6). In the texts mentioned here, designations like 'children of Abraham', 'son of Abraham' or 'daughter of Abraham' apply to Jews who are prepared to be faithful like Abraham.

In Matthew, Luke, Galatians, and Romans we find some critical notes about the self-evidence of the connection between descent from Abraham and election. Like Isaiah (Isa 63,16), John the Baptist points out to his audience[142] that being descendants of Abraham is no guarantee for redemption (Matt 3,7–10 and Luke 3,7–9). They will not be saved from the wrath to come only because they have Abraham as their father, but must repent. Being children of Abraham is no merit in itself, for God can make children to Abraham from whatever he pleases, even

140 The Psalms of Solomon probably stem from the last century B.C.E.; see D. Flusser, 'Psalms, Hymns and Prayers,' *Jewish Writings* (CRINT II/2), 573, and R.B. Wright, 'Psalms of Solomon,' *OTP* 2. 640–641.

141 'O offspring of the seed of Abraham , children of Israel, obey this Law and be altogether true to your religion (...).' 4 Maccabees probably dates from the first century C.E.; cf. M. Gilbert, 'Wisdom Literature,' *Jewish Writings* (CRINT II/2), 318, and H. Anderson, '4 Maccabees,' *OTP* 2. 533–534.

142 According to Luke, the Baptist criticizes 'the crowds', whereas in Matthew he speaks to 'many of the Pharisees and Sadducees'.

from stones. Repentance is also the main theme in the story of Zaccheus (Luke 19,1–10), the chief tax collector. After having declined his former deeds of injustice, he is called 'son of Abraham' (19,9). The designation 'daughter of Abraham' (Luke 13,16) is used for the woman cured by Jesus (13,10–17) in the synagogue during the Sabbath service. Her piety shows from the fact that she attends the service without considering her illness: since eighteen years, a 'spirit of infirmity' has made her bend down. In Luke, the terms 'seed of Abraham' (1,55) and 'Abraham our father' (1,73) furthermore occur in the context of God's promise to Abraham to help and redeem Israel; see for an evaluation of these texts section 3.3.

The fulfilment of God's promise to Israel in Jesus is a central issue in the Pauline writings and defines Paul's perspective of Abraham. In Galatians and Romans[143] Paul explores the question of Abraham's fatherhood[144] arguing that Abraham is not only the father of the Jews, but the father of all believers, and that God has fulfilled his promise to Abraham in Christ. Galatians reflects a conflict between a group of Jewish Christian missionaries advocating circumcision and observance of the Law for gentile members of the community, and Paul, who advocates their inclusion without circumcision and observance of the Law (Galatians 3). Paul's argument about Abraham in relation to the Gentiles and the Law[145] consists of three steps: A] Gen 15,6 ('he [=Abraham] believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteous-

143 A minor reference to Abraham occurs in 2 Cor 11,22, where Paul opposes a group of law-observing Jewish Christians who boast that they are 'seed of Abraham'. Against them, Paul argues that he too is a Hebrew, and Israelite, 'seed of Abraham'.

144 See for an extensive exposition of the role of Abraham in the Pauline letters Siker, *Disinheriting*, 28–76.

145 See for the structure of Paul's argument in Galatians 3: W. Baird, 'Abraham in the New Testament. Tradition and the New Identity', *Int* 42 (1988) 367–379; J.S. Vos, 'Die hermeneutische Antinomie bei Paulus (Galater 3.11–12; Römer 10.5–10)', *NTS* 38 (1992) 254–270; S. Fowl, "Who Can Read Abraham's Story? Allegory and Interpretative Power in Galatians", *JSNT* 55 (1994) 77–95

ness') implies that all who believe are sons of Abraham (Gal 3,6–7); B] Gen 12,3 and 18,18 ('in you [Abraham] shall all the nations be blessed') mean that Gentile believers are blessed with Abraham, who had faith (Gal 3,8–9); C] blessing has come to the Gentiles through Jesus, not through the Law (3,13–14),[146] for Jesus is Abraham's seed *par excellence* (3,16).[147] Since 'seed of Abraham' designates Jesus himself, Jews and Gentiles who believe in him (3,29) are 'heirs according to the promise', and 'seed of Abraham'. In line with this, Galatians 4 explains that being an heir means being free from the custody of the Law. The discourse of Gal 4,21–23 and the allegory of 4,24–30 centre on Abraham's two sons and their respective mothers;[148] Abraham only plays a secondary role (4,22).

The question of inclusion is urgent in Romans 4 and 9–11 as well. In Romans 4, Paul seems to be addressing an audience dominated by Jewish Christians (cf. 4,1). Although his tone is less polemical than in Galatians 3–4, his line of his reasoning is basically the same. In his uncircumcised state Abraham was reckoned righteous because of his faith (Rom 4,3–10; cf. Gen 15,6), and therefore he became father of all believers (Rom 4,11–12.17). At this point (Rom 4,17) Paul quotes Gen 17,5, 'for I made you the father of a multitude of nations.' Romans 9–11 on the other hand seems primarily meant for Gentile Christians

146 God's blessing was given to Abraham as a heritage by the promise, not by the Law, which came much later (3,18); cf. Wieser, *Abrahamvorstellungen*, 46, and Siker, *Disinheriting*, 39. The Law was a custodian (Gal 3,19.23–25), 'instituted until the offspring, Christ, should come to mediate the promised faith' (Siker, *Disinheriting*, 40).

147 According to Paul, the singular 'and your seed' (καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου) in Gen 13,15; 17,8; 24,7 indicates a single descendant, and not a group of descendants. In the latter case, Paul says in Gal 3,16, we would find the plural 'seeds' (οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν).

148 The slave Hagar who bears children for slavery, is Mount Sinai, which corresponds with the present Jerusalem. Sarah, 'our mother', a free woman, represents heavenly Jerusalem (4,22–26); her children, children of the promise, shall be heirs like Isaac (4,28; cf. 3,29). The quotation of Gen 21,10 LXX in 4,30 is the climax of the allegory: 'Throw out the slave and her son [...].'

questioning the election of the Jews. Here Paul underlines the traditional Jewish view that not all of Abraham's seed are elected, but that through Isaac and Jacob Abraham's seed shall be named. The children of the promise are reckoned as his seed (9,7–8.13). Among the people of the promise (the Jews) many have rejected Christ, but this does not mean that God has rejected them (11,1–2): in the end 'all Israel will be saved' (11,26). In Paul's view Abraham is and will remain the father of the Jews.

Three New Testament references to Abraham and his descendants or Abraham as a father remain. Hebr 7,5 speaks of the descendants of Abraham as people having come forth from Abraham's loins (καίπερ ἐξεληλυθότας ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος Ἀβραάμ). We are told that the Levites took tithes from their own people, who came forth from Abraham like themselves. καίπερ ἐξεληλυθότας ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος Ἀβραάμ has the same meaning as 'seed of Abraham': being a member of the Jewish people. The author of Hebrews argues that taking tithes from one's own people is different from Abraham's gift of the tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek (cf. Gen 14,18–20), for Melchizedek was a stranger. Since Melchizedek obviously was such a great man, the author of Hebrews sees him as the image of the priest-messiah, Christ (Hebr 7,1–10).[149] In Hebr 2,16, God is said to be concerned with the 'seed of Abraham', but it is unclear if the term refers to Israel, or members of the Christian community, or both.[150] The reference to Abraham and his kin in Jas 2,21 seems a traditional one appearing in the context of a discussion about faith and good works; we shall investigate this text more closely in section 2.

The traditional Jewish character of the designation 'Abraham our

149 See for traditions about Melchizedek Kugel, *Bible*, 149–162.

150 Whereas Siker (*Disinheriting*, 87–88) says that 'seed' refers to all faithful in the new covenant, Jews and Gentiles alike, Wieser (*Abrahamvorstellungen*, 115) is less optimistic about the inclusion of the people of the old covenant.

father' itself is attested by its frequent occurrence in both halakic and haggadic texts.[151] The designation 'seed of Abraham' is used incidentally and in most cases in quotations from the Old Testament; in the instances where we have found it, it is used as a reference to Israel, the chosen people, descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.[152] However, in rabbinic literature one is also aware of the fact that in the Torah itself Ishmael is named 'seed' of Abraham (Gen 21,13), and that Esau is 'seed of Abraham' too. This awareness becomes explicit in a discussion in the Babylonian Talmud (*Nedarim* 31a) about the prescript from the Mishna that one should not take profit from the 'seed of Abraham' (*m. Ned.* 3,11). The question arises whether this prohibition includes Ishmael and Esau. The outcome of this discussion is that Ishmael and Esau should be counted among the goyim and that Israel is the true 'seed of Abraham'.[153]

151 In the Mishna we find the term 'Abraham our father' (אברהם אבינו) 11 times, in the Babylonian Talmud 48 times; in the halakic midrashim 24, in the haggadic midrashim over two hundred times (data from the CDrom of Davka).

152 In *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 41.8, a midrash on Gen 13,14–15, Gen 15,18 is quoted in order to underline that the land has been given to Abraham's descendants and not to Lot. In *Midrash Rabba* on Genesis, Exodus and Numbers we find quotations from Jes 41,8 ('But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen/ the seed of Abraham my friend [אוהבי]'): in *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 44.3 the quotation underlines the election of Abraham in Mesopotamia, when he was still Abram; in *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 27.1 and *Midr. Num. Rab.* 16.3 the quotation underlines that Abraham is the father of Israel. In *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 44.9, Jes 41,8 is quoted in order to explain Exod 20,6 ('but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me [לאוהבי] and keep my commandments'). Another identification of 'seed of Abraham' with Israel is to be found in the *Mekilta, tr. Shirata*, where rabbi Jose the Galilean explains Exod 15,18 by saying that the Lord shall reign over Israel in the future: '(...) seed of Abraham, your beloved, children of Isaac, your unique one, congregation of Jacob, your firstborn, vine which you plucked up out of Egypt (...).'

153 The argument for this distinction between Israel and the other descendants of Abraham is to be found in Gen 21,12, 'for through Isaac your seed shall be named' (italics CCMdL). This means that Ishmael is not the elected seed of Abraham; it also excludes Esau, because the phrase does not (*continued on next page*)

In sum, we may conclude that Jewish literature until the early second century C.E. and later offers a fairly consistent picture of Abraham as the father of Israel/the Jews. The term 'seed of Abraham' designates Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob and has the connotation of election, as a great number of texts shows. However, in some texts, i.e. Isa 63,16 and Matthew, Luke, Galatians and Romans, we find critical notes with regard to the association of descent of Abraham/being children of Abraham with the motif of election. This criticism is partly based on ethical and moral arguments (being seed of Abraham implies righteousness and repentance), partly on the question whether faithful Gentiles should not be considered children of Abraham as well. Apart from this tendency to broaden the scope, we find a tendency to associate 'children of Abraham' and related terms with people of outstanding faith. Luke uses the designations 'son' and 'daughter' of Abraham for pious Israelites and repenting sinners, while 4 Maccabees associates similar terms with martyrdom.

3.2. Abraham, the man of faith and faithfulness

However imprecise John 8,39–40 may be about the works of Abraham, the least one can say is that these works are the opposite of the deeds of Jesus' opponents, who refuse to believe God's envoy, the messenger of divine truth, and even seek his death. By contrast, Abraham is the man who accepts God's messenger and God's truth. In traditions about Abraham contemporary to John, the images of Abraham as a man in search of the divine truth and as a true believer hold an impor-

say 'all your seed shall be named'. The awareness that Ishmael and Esau are descendants of Abraham, albeit not the elected ones, also shows from *M. Exod. Rab.* 5.22, where Moses asks God why Esau and Ishmael should not be subjected to slavery like Israel. Moses asks this question because he has read the book Bereshit, where God said to Abraham 'Know of a surety that your seed will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there (...)' (Gen 15,13).

tant place. He is often seen as the first monotheist (3.2.1); many texts emphasize his faithfulness and obedience, and the acts and merits resulting from his faith (3.2.2).

3.2.1. Abraham as believer in the true God, the first monotheist

Most traditions about Abraham as a monotheist are derived from the story about his relatives and his migration in Gen 11,27–12,9. Terah and his family leave Ur of Chaldaea and settle in Haran, where Terah dies. Then YHWH urges Terah's son Abraham to leave his country and kinsmen for a land that He will show him, promising him that he will become a great nation and a blessing to all races on earth. Having heard this promise, Abraham leaves for Canaan.

Interpretations of this narrative are already to be found in the Old Testament itself. According to Josh 24,2–3, the ancestors of Israel, living beyond the Euphrates, were idolaters; then God took Abraham out and led him to Canaan.[154] Jdt 5,7–8 on the other hand suggests that worship of the God of heaven started before Abraham. Israel's ancestors left Mesopotamia because they were put under pressure to participate in Chaldaean idolatry.[155] The element of Abraham's 'otherness', already present in Joshua 24,[156] becomes more explicit in *Jubilees* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. In *Jub* 11,16–12,31, young Abraham rejects Chaldaean worship in favour of the worship of the one Creator. His

154 The reference to Abraham occurs within Joshua's speech about Israel's choice of the Lord or other gods (Josh 24,14–17).

155 Jdt 5,9 continues with Israel's migration to Canaan. The exposition of Israel's history in Jdt 5,5–19 is put into the mouth of Achior, an Ammonite officer in Assyrian service, who, being an outsider, does not mention any figure of Israel's history by name.

156 Kugel (*Bible*, 134) points out that from Josh 24,2–3 ancient interpreters concluded that Abraham was already different from Nahor and Haran. The phrase "and they served other gods" refers to Nahor and Haran, not to Abraham. Abraham is singled out because he did not believe in the Mesopotamian (*continued of next page*)

father Terah sympathizes in secret with Abraham's religious views, but his brothers condemn him. When he is sixty years old Abraham sets fire to the house of idols, with dire consequences: his brother Haran dies in the flames while trying to save the idols. The migration to Haran takes place after these events and marks a new phase in Abraham's faith. By observing the firmament Abraham comes to the conclusion that the whole universe is in the hand of the Lord. He prays to God to save him from evil spirits and from going astray, and God answers his prayer by urging him to leave Haran and promising him that he will be a blessing. A similar story is told in *Apoc. Abr.* 1–8,[157] but there the gap between Abraham and his relatives has become unbridgeable. They have become manufacturers of idols; even Terah, who in *Jub.* 11,16–12,31 sympathized with monotheism, seriously believes in the powers of his artefacts. Having found out that the idols do not have any power at all, Abraham tries to convince his father of the might of the one Creator God, but in vain. Thereupon God urges him to leave his father's house. Abraham has barely left the entrance court, when fire comes down and devours Terah and his house.

In *Biblical Antiquities* 6–7, Abraham's rejection of idolatry takes place against the background of the building of the tower of Babel. Abraham and his relatives Nahor and Lot are among a group of twelve who worship the Lord. They are put into prison, because they refuse to participate in building the tower. All of them escape, except Abraham, who is thrown into the fiery furnace in which the bricks for the tower are made. Then God causes an earthquake, which makes the fire leap

gods. Isa 51,2, 'for when he (Abraham) was but one I called him' came to be interpreted in a similar way: Abraham was taken out of Chaldaea because he was the only one who did not worship idols.

157 The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is based on the vision of Abraham in Genesis 15. The core of the work probably stems from between 70 C.E. and the middle of the second century C.E.; cf. M.E. Stone, 'Apocalyptic Literature', *Jewish Writings* (CRINT II/2), 415–416; B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *Die Apokalypse Abrahams* (JSHRZ V/5; Gütersloh: Mohn 1982), 419; R. Rubinkiewicz, 'Apocalypse of Abraham', *OTP* 1. 683.

out from the furnace and consume the bystanders instead of Abraham.[158] Despite the disaster, the building of the tower continues. In order to prevent its completion, God confuses the languages and disperses mankind, but promises to elect Abraham and save and protect him.[159]

The figure of Abraham in both Philo and Flavius Josephus matches Hellenistic standards: he is a sage in search of true knowledge (Philo), a philosopher and a gifted orator (Josephus). Philo's Abraham is essentially the prototype of the sage who abstains from earthly materialism and searches for the true God, the Mind (νοῦς) of the universe. In *De migratione*, this picture is explained allegorically, while in *De Abrahamo* it is explained literally.[160] Since the role of Abraham in other treatises is significantly less important, we shall refer to these works while discussing *De migratione* and *De Abrahamo*.

The treatise *De migratione* is entirely about Gen 12,1–4.6. Philo pictures Abraham as a sage in search of true knowledge, i.e. the sight of

158 The occurrence of fire in the stories about Abraham in Chaldaea is probably due to a word play with the name Ur (אוּר, Gen 11,28). Another vocalisation of Ur turns it into 'or (אוֹר), 'light'; cf. HALAT vol. I, 24; Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 39 n. 86. As we have seen, in *Jub.* 12,14, fire causes the premature death of Haran (cf. Gen 11,28).

159 Cf. *Bib. Ant.* 23,5 for another reference to the episode of the fiery furnace: 'And when all those inhabiting the land were being led astray after their own devices, Abraham believed in me and was not led astray with them. And I rescued him from the flame and took him and brought him over all the land of Canaan and said to him in a vision: "To your seed I will give this land."' The context of this passage is the covenant of Joshua (23,1–14; cf. Josh 24).

160 'The literal Abraham is the historical character of the simple biblical account, though by no means a character of such simplicity in Philo (...). The allegorical Abraham is the historical character who abandoned pantheistic materialism and went on to the cognition of the true god by a process of freeing his soul from domination by the body' (Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 96). Abraham nevertheless remains one and the same person: the literal and allegorical in Philo's picture are basically literary forms, and the choice for either of them depends entirely on the author's subject matter (Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 187; see for an exposition about Abraham in Philo's writings *Philo's Place*, 104–185).

God, the Mind of the universe. Abraham's journey from Chaldaea to Canaan symbolizes the mind's way to knowledge of God, the mental development of the sage,[161] and comprises several stages (*Mig.* 176–216). The first stage, the migration from Chaldaea, symbolizes mind's farewell to materialistic pantheism as the conviction that visible phenomena determine man's life. Abraham then arrives at Haran, symbol of knowledge through sense perception. By leaving Haran he leaves the senses, obstructers of true knowledge, i.e. knowledge of God, as well as astrology, another imperfect form of knowledge. No longer hindered by the senses, the mind moves to the phase of sleeping and dreaming which enables it to discern prophecies. The journey from Haran to Canaan represents the stage of accurate self-knowledge, curiosity from learning. At the end the sage reaches Shechem, symbol of toil.[162]

Although *De Abrahamo* gives more credit to the literal Abraham of the Genesis story than *De migratione,* Abraham remains an archetype, the man who led a perfect life and whose deeds were recorded in Holy Scripture as an example for others (Abr. 4). Moreover, Philo does not abstain from the allegorical reading in this tractate either. Apart from a literal interpretation for the masses (147), he gives an allegorical interpretation for a select audience (200). In his literal reading of the Abraham narrative (60–67), Philo pictures Abraham as a historical figure, a sage, a virtuous and pious man observing all commandments

161 Cf. *Praem.* 50: Abraham is the first man to pass from vanity to truth and the first to believe in God. He rejects the deceptions of Chaldaean astrology. By instruction he becomes a believer, from sophist he becomes a sage. According to *Gig.* 62–64, the change of the name Abram into Abraham (Gen 17,5) symbolizes the turn from materialistic astrology to the contemplation of the invisible world. The name Abram (Hebrew: Ab-ram [אב-רם], 'uplifted father') refers to his study of the supramundane; the name Abraham, given to him after he has become a man of God, designates the reasoning of the good man (cf. *Cher.* 7). See for Philo's treatment of names, Sandmel, *Philo's Place*, 161 n. 270; 169 n. 314.

162 Cf. Gen 12,6. Literally, Shechem means 'shouldering' and is made to refer to those parts of the body needed for hard work. Cf. *L.A.* 3.25; *Mig.* 221 about Gen 49,15.

given to him by God in speech and writing, as well as the commandments shown to him by nature. In other words, Abraham lives according to the highest law, the law of nature. The first proof of Abraham's piety recorded in Holy Writ is his migration from Chaldaea to Canaan. Because his love of the divine surpasses his love of earthly matters, Abraham obeys the oracle that tells him to abandon everything and leave for an unknown land. The sublime character of his journey becomes even more obvious if we compare his motives for travelling with those of others.[163] According to the allegorical reading of Abraham's migration (*Abr.* 68–84), the Holy Word (ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος) instigates Abraham to dismiss the science of Chaldaea (71). Abraham represents the mind, befriended with virtue, in search of the true God. The issue of Abraham's virtuousness is expanded in *De Virtutibus* (216–220).[164] Abraham's faith is the highest and most stable virtue, bringing him honour. The people around him consider him a king,[165] for God made him a beautiful man with a persuasive voice. Abraham is for high nobility, a prophet, a king, a friend of virtue. He is the model of all proselytes leaving idolatry and settling in the country of monotheism.

Flavius Josephus pictures Abraham as a Greek philosopher, a man becoming monotheist by logical deduction. Abraham moves with his father Terah and his family from Chaldaea to Haran, where God bids him to go to Canaan (*Ant.* 1.148–157; cf. Gen 11,28–12,5). His migration is due to the fact that his fellow countrymen oppose his monotheism. Abraham is the first monotheist. His belief in the one creator

163 Philo gives several reasons for travelling, all of them less noble than Abraham's motives: commerce, state affairs, curiosity for foreign cultures. All people travelling because of these motives sooner or later long to turn back home. Not so Abraham, whose farewell to his kinsmen and homeland is definitive.

164 According to *Virt.* 211–215 Terah is the astrologer, and not Abraham, who is convinced that astrology leads to ignorance about the one true God and therefore leaves his country.

165 Cf. LXX Gen 23,6: 'Listen to us, lord! you are like a king from God among us.'

God is founded on rational grounds: the fact that the celestial bodies and other objects of nature, despite their irregular movements, are beneficial for mankind brings Abraham to the conclusion that they must be guided by an external force. Abraham's journey to Egypt (*Ant.* 1.161–168; cf. Gen 12,10–20) results from his desire to investigate the soundness of his ideas about God. He is even prepared to accept the doctrines of the Egyptian priests, provided that they turn out to be more convincing than his. Since this is not the case, Abraham tries to convince them of the soundness of his own ideas. With his intelligence and power of persuasion he demonstrates the inadequacy of the Egyptian creed and teaches the Egyptians arithmetic and astronomy, sciences which were hitherto unknown to them. It was Abraham who brought arithmetic and astronomy to Egypt, whence they were passed on to the Greeks.[166]

In the New Testament we do not find references to Abraham's monotheism in the strict sense, but in the Targumim[167] and *Midrash Rabba*

from among the gentiles and migrated to Canaan; Eupolemos (in Eusebius *Praep. ev.* 9,17.3–4) tells that Abraham excelled in nobility, wisdom and knowledge of astrology and Chaldaean craft. He taught the Phoenicians the cycles of sun and moon. According to Artapanus (in Eusebius *Praep. ev.* 9,18.1), Abraham came with his house to Egypt and taught the Egyptian king astrology.

167 According to J. Trebolle Barrera (*The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible, An Introduction to the History of the Bible*. Translated form the Spanish by Wilfred G.E. Watson [Brill/Eerdmans: Leiden/New York etc., 1998] 324–332), *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Fragmentary Targum* and *Neofiti* 1 represent the Palestinian exegetical tradition; the general idea is that they are all based on an older, Palestinian Targum. Some scholars attribute them to the period before the completion of the Mishna, while specialists in the field of Qumran studies tend to prefer a later date. The oldest sections of *Targum Peudo-Jonathan* are pre-Christian; *Fragmentary Targum* may be an extract of a complete Palestinian Targum. The language of *Targum Neofiti* 1 seems to be older than the Galilean Aramaic of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and the Midrashim, but the suggestions by A. Diéz Macho that it stems from the first century C.E. does not meet with general support. See for a critical view on a presupposed Palestinian Targum in general, and Diéz Macho's early dating of *Targum Neofiti* in particular, G. Boccaccini, (*continued of next page*)

this motive does play a role. *Targum Onqelos* for instance avoids any term that may associate Abraham with idolatry. Consequently, the 'oak-tree' of Moreh (MT Gen 12,6) is replaced by the 'valley' of Moreh, since in the Old Testament idolatry is often connected with trees and high places.[168] *Tgs. Neof., Onq.* and *Ps.-J.* Gen 20,13 all say that God took Abraham away from the idolatry of the nations. *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 11,28 is particularly interesting because it combines elements found in various sources:[169] Abraham refuses to worship the god of Nimrod, is thrown into the fiery furnace and is saved by God.[170] Haran says he will choose the god of the winning party, an opportunism for which he is to pay dearly, as he is burnt by fire from heaven. God elected Abraham because of his aversion to idolatry. In *Midrash Genesis Rabba* the traditional elements of the fiery furnace, the attitude of Abraham's relatives and the worship of idols are reinterpreted. Now Terah, manufacturer of idols, is the villain. Because Abraham mocks his father's idols, Terah hands him over to Nimrod, who casts him into the fire.

'The *Targum Neofiti* as a Proto-Rabbinic Document: a Systematic Analysis', *The Aramaic Bible. Targums in their Historical Context* (ed. D.R.G. Beattie and M.J. McNamara; *JSOTSup* 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 254–263. According to P.S. Alexander ('Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures', *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* [ed. M.J. Mulder and H. Sysling; CRINT II/1; Assen-Maastricht-Philadelphia: Van Gorcum-Fortress, 1988], 247–249), *Targum Onqelos* dates from between 135 and the late second century C.E. Trebolle Barrera (*The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 328–329) points out the Palestinian origin of *Targum Onqelos*, whose definitive edition stems from Babylonia.

168 See e.g. Deut 12,2; 1 Kgs 14,23; 2 Kgs 16,4; Jer 2,20; 3,6.13; 17,2; Ezek 6,13; see on the other hand Josh 24,25, where the sanctuary of the Lord is erected at the oak tree of Shechem. In a later period, the sanctuary in Shechem fell into discredit. The replacement of 'oak-tree' by 'valley' in *Tg. Onq.* Gen *12,6* also appears in *Sam. Tg., Tgs. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.* Gen 12,6. B. Chilton: http://www.hendrickson.com/pdf/chapters/1565637658-ch01.pdf.

169 See the stories from *Jubilees, Biblical Antiquities* and *Apocalypse of Abraham* mentioned above.

170 Cf. also the reference to Abraham's salvation from the fiery furnace in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 15,7.

Haran is standing nearby, undecided whether he should choose Abraham's belief or Nimrod's. However, when Nimrod asks him where he stands, he declares himself to be of his brother's faith, is cast into the fire and dies.[171]

In sum, we may say that in the Old Testament Abraham is already pictured as the man who left idolatry. The Abraham cycle itself does not make the connection between Abraham's departure from Mesopotamia and the idolatry of his native land, but in Joshua and Judit the association does occur. Later sources (*Biblical Antiquities*, *Jubilees* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*) go even further by distinguishing Abraham from his idolatrous relatives, although they are idolatrous in different degrees. To Philo and Josephus, Abraham's excellence is due to his being a sage and philosopher whose faith in the one God is the result of the true philosopher's search for wisdom and, according to Josephus, science. This Hellenistic-Jewish perspective of Abraham's faith seems to have influenced the *Targumim* and *Midrash Rabba*, which expand and reinterpret the Biblical and Pseudepigraphic stories about Abraham's migration and monotheism, emphasizing his dedication and adherence to God.[172]

170 Cf. also the reference to Abraham's salvation from the fiery furnace in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 15,7.

171 *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 38.13. *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 52.11 on Gen 20,13 reflects *Tgs. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.* Gen 20,13.

172 In his discussion of ancient interpretations of Abraham's journey from Mesopotamia, Kugel (*Bible* 135–144) distinguishes between various exegetical motifs, e.g. Abraham the monotheist, Terah the idolator, Abraham as astronomer, Abraham rescued from Chaldaea. Because these motifs are interrelated, we have chosen in section 3.2.1. to take them together.

3.2.2. Abraham and his works of faith

In early Jewish literature and subsequent Christian and rabbinic literature, Abraham is praised for his faith and obedience. The foundation for this praise lies in Gen 15,6 ('And he believed YHWH; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness') and Gen 22,12 ('...for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me').[173] When in LXX 2 Ezra 9,8 Ezra says that God found Abraham's heart faithful before Him and made a covenant with him, he obviously alludes to Gen 15,6. Philo too regards Gen 15,6 as a testimony to Abraham's faith. According to him, Abraham is rewarded for his faith with faithfulness (*Abr.* 262–275).[174] Gen 15,6 is the basis for Paul's argument in Galatians that Abraham was justified by faith (Gal 3,6), not by his observance of the Law, which was given four hundred and thirty years later (Gal 3,17). In Romans Paul makes the same point: Abraham was justified by his faith, not by his works (Rom 4,2–3). Because faith was reckoned to him before he was circumcised, he became the father of all believers, circumcised and uncircumcised alike (Rom 4,11–12).

In a number of writings, Gen 15,6 is explained in view of Genesis 22. 1 Macc 2,52 [175] says that Abraham proved faithful when tried and that this faithfulness was reckoned to him as righteousness. In *Jub.* 17,16–18 we find an entire sequence of events (promise, faith, trial of Abraham instigated by Mastema and sacrifice of Isaac) as proof of Abraham's faith.[176] Jas 2,21 echoes the tradition known from 1 Macc 2,52

173 See for the reception of Gen 15,6 in the Old Testament and early Jewish literature, M. Oeming, 'Der Glaube Abrahams. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gen 15,6 in der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels', *ZAW* 110 (1998) 116–133.

174 Philo's interpretation is based on the double meaning of πίστις, i.e. 'faith' and 'faithfulness'. See for Abraham's faith and the response by God also *Praem.* 30 and *Mig.* 43–44.

175 1 Macc 2,52 is part of Mattathias' appeal to remember the works of the ancestors, to begin with the works of Abraham. See for the combination of Gen 15,6 and Genesis 22 Philo, *Deus* 4.

and other sources: 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?' Although it is uncertain whether James reacts against the Pauline concept of justification through faith, it is important to note that he takes an almost opposite stance, stressing the importance of works as the completion of faith, for 'faith apart from works is barren' (Jas 2,20). 'The works' of offering up Isaac are the completion of Abraham's faith, and for this Abraham is called 'friend of God' (Jas 2,23).[177] With regard to the role of Gen 15,6 in rabbinic sources, we may point out the interpretation in the *Mekilta* of God giving Abraham this world and the world to come as a reward for his faith (Bešallah 7), and the concept that the Israelites inherited Abraham's faith which is to be found in *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 3.12 and 23.5.[178]

The *binding of Isaac* is considered to be the ultimate proof of Abraham's faith. In Jdt 8,26 Judith reminds the elders of threatened Betulia of Abraham's trial, and Sir 44,19–20 praises Abraham, because he remained faithful in 'the trial'. Wis 10,5 merely alludes to Abraham, ascribing his steadfastness to Wisdom, while 4 Macc 14,20, 15,28 and 16,20 refer to Genesis 22 within the context of martyrdom. According to *Bib. Ant.* 18,5, Abraham did not refuse his son as a burnt offering. Therefore his offering was acceptable to God and became the reason for

176 In *Jub.* 17,16–18 Abraham is described as being faithful in all tests he has undergone so far; this is already attested in an early manuscript of *Jubilees* in Qumran, 4Q225.

177 1 *Clem.* 10,10–14 has an interesting interpretation with regard to Abraham and his works of faith. Abraham is called 'God's friend' because of his faithfulness and obedience, which are not connected with Gen 15,6 or Genesis 22, but with his migration. Only after that Gen 15,6 is quoted. Subsequently, Abraham is said to have been given a son in his old age because of his faith and hospitality, and to have offered him as a sacrifice out of obedience (1 *Clem.* 10,14). Another combination of Gen 15,6 and Genesis 22 is to be found in Irenaeus' interpretation of John 8,56 (!) in *Adv. Haer.* 5,3–4.

178 Note however that this source is quite late.

the election of his descendants. *Bib. Ant.* 32,2 emphasizes Abraham's willingness to return to God what He had given him.[179] Philo regards the sacrifice of Isaac as Abraham's greatest deed, a sacrifice not to be compared with the child sacrifices of other nations, because Abraham acted out of obedience to God, not for his own glory or praise of the masses (*Abr.* 178–197). In the allegorical sense, Abraham is the sage who offers his joy to God (*Abr.* 200–207).[180] The rendering of Genesis 22 by Flavius Josephus (*Ant.* 1.222–236) emphasizes the virtuousness of Abraham, who manifests his piety towards God by putting 'the doing of God's good pleasure even above the life of his child' (224). For this manifestation of piety God will regard him and his race (234).

In the New Testament we find only few references to the binding of Isaac. Apart from *Jas* 2,20–24, which we have already discussed, Hebr 11,17–19 refers to the *aqeda*, describing it as the last of three signs of Abraham's faith and explaining Abraham's act as *the* expression of his belief that God had the power to resurrect Isaac from the dead.[181] In rabbinic literature the binding of Isaac foreshadows future events like the Exodus and the destruction of the Temple, and practices like blowing the ram's horn on Rosh-hashana.[182]

In literature of this period, the image of Abraham as the man of faith

179 According to *Bib. Ant.* 32,1, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son because of the jealousy of the angels; see for this motif also *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 55.4. In *Bib. Ant.* 32,2–4 and 40,2, Isaac shows himself prepared to be sacrificed upon the altar.

180 Probably a reference to the name Isaac, 'he laughs.' In *Quod Deus* 4, Philo describes Isaac as 'that clearest image of self-learned wisdom', the 'trueborn offspring of the soul'.

181 A similar idea, namely that the binding of Isaac is the last in a series of trials by which God tested Abraham's faith, occurs in *Jub.* 17,17–18, a text we have alread referred to, and various early Jewish and rabbinic sources, e.g. *Tg. Neof.* Gen 22,1; *m.'Abot* 5,3; *'Abot R. Nat.* 33,2; *b. Sanh.* 89b; *Pirqe R. El.* 31.1; see Kugel, *Bible*, 165–178. See for a parallel also *1 Clem.* 10,10–14 (n. 177 above).

182 Abraham asks God to hear Isaac's offspring in the hour of affliction (*Tgs. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.* Gen 22,14; *Tg. J. Mic* 7,20; cf. *m. Ta'an.* 2,4). The blowing of the ram's horn on Rosh-hashana may remind God to the binding (*continued on next page*)

is connected with Genesis 15 or 22, but not exclusively. 2 Macc 1,2 for instance describes Abraham and the other patriarchs in a more general way as 'faithful servants of God'. Hebr 6,15 simply mentions Abraham's patient endurance. Philo points out that proofs of Abraham's piety have been written down in Scripture (*Abr.* 60–61). Among these proofs Philo counts the fact that God saves Abraham's marriage (*Abr.* 90; cf. Gen 12,10–20). Philo further says that Abraham 'came near to God' (*Mig.* 128–132, after Gen 18,23), and that his attachment to God should be imitated by other people. But Gen 17,17 ('And then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself: 'Shall a child be born to man who is a hundred years old?' [...]') poses a problem, for here it seems that Abraham doubts God's promise. According to Philo however, Abraham's doubt is so short-lived that he does not even utter it (*Mut.* 177–178). Rabbinic sources emphasize that Abraham never doubted God.[183]

Another characteristic of Abraham is his *observance of the Law and the commandments*. This motif already occurs in the Old Testament: in Gen 26,5, Abraham is said to have obeyed God and to have kept God's commandments, statutes and laws, and Sir 44,20 makes the same point saying that he kept the 'the law of the Most High'. Abraham is called 'friend of God' (Isa 41,8) because he observed the commandments and handed them down to Isaac and Jacob (CD 3,2–4).[184] Flavius Josephus makes Abraham into the symbol of dedication to the Law (*Ant.* 5.113). In 4 Macc 6,17–22, Eleazar refuses to eat pork because 'children of

of Isaac (*BT Roš. Haš.* 16a). According to the *Mekilta*, the blood of Isaac is connected with the blood of the Paschal lamb and the destruction of Jerusalem (*Pisha* 7 on Exod 12,13); the knife of Abraham (Gen 22,10) is the counterpart of the sword by which Pharaoh persecuted Israel (*Bešallah* 2, on Exod 14,6).

183 See *b. Sanh.* 111a. Abraham is God-fearing, he acted out of love for God (*t. Sota* 6,1).

184 Cf. *Jub.* 21: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob pass the Law and the commandments on to their children.

Abraham' remain faithful to the divine Law and are even prepared to die for it.

Specific commandants are dated back to Abraham as well. In the Old Testament we find that Abraham undergoes circumcision, the physical sign of God's covenant with Israel (Genesis 17; cf. Sir 44,20), whereas the sacrifice in Genesis 15 may allude to practices of the Temple cult.[185] According to *Jubilees*, Abraham observes specific commandments, especially some related to the cult: he observes the commandment of the tithe (13,25–27) and circumcision (15,23–24); he teaches Isaac not to eat with unclean hands and to keep away from the impurity of blood, and brings sacrifices in the way it is prescribed (21). He celebrates Shavuot (16,13; 22,1–9) and Sukkot (16,20–31).

Some early Jewish and Jewish-Christian authors acknowledge the fact that in Abraham's time the Law had not been given yet. Philo for instance argues that Abraham kept the divine law and the divine commandments, although he had not been taught the written text.[186] He kept the Law of nature, the law superseding all other laws and reflected best in the written Torah. Because he followed nature, Abraham himself became a law (*Abr.* 275).[187] Isaac received the natural laws from his father, whereas the sons of the concubines were given the positive laws (*Mig.* 94). Paul's letter to the Galatians shows another attitude towards the relation between Abraham and the Law. While emphasizing the importance of Abraham's faith and of God's promise to him, Paul recalls the fact that the Law was much later than Abraham (Gal 3,17). In rabbinic writings on the other hand, Abraham's observance of the Law is a prominent issue and extends to both Written and Oral Law.[188]

185 Four of the animals mentioned in Gen 15,9 play a role in the offer cult: the heifer (cf. Deut 21,3–4.6; 1 Sam 16,2); the goat (e.g. Exod 12,5; Lev 1,10); the ram (e.g. Exod 29,15–19; Lev 5,15–16); the turtledove (e.g. Lev 1,14; 5,7).

186 Cf. 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 57,2, which says that in Abraham's days an unwritten Law was in force.

187 See for a similar argument Justin, *Apol.* 1.46.

188 Abraham introduces the morning prayer (*b. Ber.* 26b; y. *Ber.* 1,6) and the evening prayer (*b. Yoma* 28b); he also introduces the animal sacrifices (*continued on page* 118)

Traditions about Abraham's *hospitality* rely on the narrative in Gen 18,1–16. In the heat of the day three men appear before Abraham, one of whom speaks as God. Abraham receives these unknown and unexpected guests with unbounded hospitality. In his literal interpretation of the story, Philo explains Abraham's hospitality as the third sign of his piety (*Abr.* 107) and the highest virtue (114). In the allegorical sense, Gen 18,1–16 tells about the pure Mind (Abraham), the perfection of virtue (Sarah), and the expression of thought (the servant, cf. Gen 18,7) working together to serve God (*QG* 4.8). Another tradition concerning Genesis 18 tells us that Abraham put up his tent at the crossroads of Mamre and took in whoever passed there, the sick and the healthy, the rich and the poor (*T. Abr.* A 1,2).[189] Rabbinic writings praise Abraham for his hospitality and suggest that true believers should imitate him.[190] According to the *Midrash Rabba*, the events of the Exodus reflect the deeds of Abraham in Genesis 18.[191] Closely related to Abraham's hospitality is the issue of his activity as man who makes proselytes;[192] how-

(cf. Gen 15,9: *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 44.14). His actions are a point of reference for contemporary practices, such as divorce (*t. Yebam.* 8,4), paternal religious duties (*b. Qidd.* 29a), and eagerness to perform religious duties (*b. Yoma* 28b). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are called 'powerful in Torah' (*b. Sota* 14a); Abraham performed the Torah (*m. Qidd.* 4,14; cf. *b. Yoma* 28b).

189 It is difficult to establish the date of origin of the Testament of Abraham. E.P. Sanders ('Testament of Abraham', *OTP* 1. 875) says it may originate from c. 100 C.E. Recension A in particular shows traces of later redaction.

190 Abraham's hospitality is an example for others (*'Abot R. Nat.* A 13,3; B 14); Abraham proves that the zaddik is one who says little but gives much (*b. B. Mez.* 87a); he also proves that hospitality to strangers is greater than receiving the Shekinah (*b. Šeb.* 35b). Abraham builds inns to receive wayfarers (*'Abot R. Nat.* A 7,1) and makes his guests pronounce God's name (*b. Sota* 10ab).

191 *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 25.5 on Exod 16,4 associates Abraham's gift of water to his guests (Gen 18,4) with God's gift of water from the rock (Exod 17,6); Abraham's gift of bread (Gen 18,5) with God's gift of bread from heaven (Exod 16,4) etc. In *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 48.10, Abraham's deeds extend to both the Exodus and the World to Come.

192 See e.g. *'Abot R. Nat.* A 12,7; B 26; *b. Sanh.* 99b; *b. Sota* 10ab; *Sipre* Deut wa'ethannan 32; *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 39.14.

ever, this issue does not seem to have played a role in John's time.[193]

Only few texts refer to the *works* of Abraham in general terms, as John does.[194] *Jub.* 23,10 calls Abraham 'perfect in all of his actions with the Lord'[195] and 'pleasing through righteousness all the days of his life,' and in *2 Apoc. Bar.* 57,2[196] we find an indefinite remark about the 'works of the commandments' being accomplished in Abraham's time, together with the foundation of faith in the judgment and hope for eternal life.

The theme of Abraham's *merits* is more common. These merits find their origin in God's promise and grace towards Abraham[197] and/or in Abraham's own works of faith. Thus, in Gen 22,15–18, Abraham is blessed because he has shown himself ready to sacrifice his son, and in Gen 26,5, Abraham's obedience results in God's promise to Isaac. According to Philo Epicus F 1–2,[198] the promise to Abraham has become immortal through the binding of Isaac. Philo too regards the election of Abraham as a merit, a result of his deeds (*Abr.* 83). Because

193 Perhaps Josephus (*Ant.* 1.161.167) hints at this issue, although not in connection with Genesis 18; see section 3.2.1. for a rendering of the text from *Antiquitates.*

194 As we have seen, *Jas* 2,21 applies the term 'works' to a specific deed, the binding of Isaac.

195 The plural 'works' occurs in the Latin manuscript; the Ethiopic version has the singular 'work' (cf. the German translation by K. Berger, *Jubiläen*, 441).

196 According to M.E. Stone ('Apocalyptic Literature', *Jewish Writings*, 410) 2 *Apoc. Bar.* stems from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century C. E.; the latter option is supported by A.F.J. Klijn ('2 [Syriac] Apocalypse of Baruch', *OTP* 1. 616–617).

197 In this respect Abraham is usually mentioned together with Isaac and Jacob, especially in connection with the covenant between God and Israel (e.g. Exod 2,24; 6,3.8; 32,13); the deuteronomistic tradition emphasizes that God delivered Israel because of his promise to the patriarchs (e.g. Deut 6,10; 9,5.27; 29,12). See for this concept also 1 Chron 29,18; *Ant* .11.169; with regard to the creation of the world 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 21,24. In rabbinic literature the theme of the merits of the father has been elaborated further; see A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinical Literature* (2d. ed.; New York: KTAV, 1968), 146–171.

198 In: Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9,20.1.

of his merits, Abraham was elected, and therefore he was able to intercede for his sinful countrymen (*QG* 3.44) and for Lot, who is explicitly said to have been saved because of Abraham (*QG* 4.54).[199] The Targumim on Gen 15,1 tell that Abraham will be rewarded for his meritorious deeds in the World to Come.

In the Old Testament it is repeatedly attested that whatever God did for Israel He did for the sake of Abraham (e.g. 2 Chron 20,7; Ps 105,8–9.12–15; Isa 51,1–2; Sir 44,19–21).[200] The idea that Abraham's actions affect the future of his descendants continues to play a role in the Pseudepigrapha, and is elaborated further in rabbinic writings, especially with regard to the experience of the Exodus and the expectation of the World to Come.[201] In addition to the interpretation of Abraham's vision in Gen 15,1 as a reward for Abraham's meritorious actions, *Tg. Neof.* Gen 15,11 for example says that the house of Israel shall find deliverance in the merits of their father Abraham. However, as we have seen before, in the Old Testament there are also critical voices to be heard against the 'automatic' appeal to Abraham and his merits. Apart from the texts mentioned earlier, we may point out Ezekiel 33,24, where Israel uses the following argument in favour of their possession of the land: 'Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.'

199 Cf. for the idea that Abraham and the other patriarchs are the reason for the salvation and redemption of Israel e.g. *T. Asher* 7,7; *T. Levi* 15,4; cf. *T. Moses* 3,8–9 and 4,2–5. In *T. Abr.* A 12–14 Abraham intercedes for a certain soul, but it is unclear if this 'soul' is an Israelite or not. See for the idea of intercession by the fathers also 3 *Enoch* 44,7, although this source is probably rather late.

200 See also the frequent references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

201 To give just a few examples: according to Rabbi Eleazar, 'for you' in Exod 16,4 ('Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you'), is an appeal to the merits of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*Mekilta tr. Wayase* on Exod 16,4); according to *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 23.5 Moses and the Israelites sang their song (Exod 15,1) because of the merit of Abraham's faith (Gen 15,6); Abraham's merits help others, like Og (*b. Nid.* 61a). See for a comprehensive survey of texts Marmorstein, *Merits*.

In *vv*25–29 the prophet declares that they will not possess the land if they will not do away their abominations. The criticism in the New Testament against an easy appeal to Abraham has already been dealt with in section 3.1.

In sum, Abraham is traditionally pictured as a man with admirable traits. He is praised for his good deeds and observance of the Law, his faith and obedience to God. He is a role model for observing the commandments, some of which are even said to go back to him. Abraham is associated with a wide range of *mitsvot*, ranging from cultic to dietary prescripts, from circumcision to washing hands before meals. His hospitality too is legendary and an example for others. The binding of Isaac is the ultimate proof of Abraham's faith and obedience to God, and therefore according to some texts the reason for the election of Abraham's offspring. Because of his election, his faith and good works, Abraham received merits, which he passed on to his descendants. In some texts, the act of appealing to these merits is not deemed to be invalid, but viewed critically when undertaken without considering one's attitude and actions.

3.3. Abraham, freedom and slavery

The association of Abraham with freedom (John 8,32–33) as opposed to slavery (John 8,33) is an old one. The association of Abraham with freedom and slavery in the literal, i.e. social and political, sense has

202 LXX ἐλεύθερος and ἐλευθερόω refer to: a) being released from slavery (cf. Exod 21,26–27; Deut 15,12; Jer 41,9.14.16), cf. Hebrew חפשׁ; b) being a free man (cf. 1 Kgs 21,8= LXX 3 Kgs 20,8) or a nobleman (cf. Neh 13,17 = LXX 2 Ezra 23,17); c) being free or become free from oppression by foreign powers (cf. 1 Macc 14,26; 2 Macc 1,27; 3 Macc 7,20; 1 Ezra 4,49); d) being exempt from taxes (cf. 1 Sam 17,25 = LXX 1 Kgs 17,25; 1 Macc 10,33). For a more spiritual sense of the word, see 4 Macc 14,2 and LXX Prov 25,10a.

its roots in the Old Testament.[202] As we have seen in chapter 2 of this study, Genesis 15 gives a forecast of the *slavery* of Abraham's offspring ('your seed', *v* 13) in Egypt. The idea that Abraham himself was a *free* (ἐλεύθερος) man is attested in a number of writings. In *Sobr.* 56–57 Philo describes Abraham as well-born, the only true king and the only truly free man. His father, so to speak, was God, and he was God's son. The status of Abraham reflects on his kinsmen and descendants. According to *T. Napht.* 1,10,[203] Bilha's father Rotheos was 'of Abraham's tribe (ἐκ τοῦ γένεους ἦν Ἀβραάμ), a Chaldaean, one who honoured God, free and well-born.' In Josephus' account of the revolt against Moses (*Ant.* 4.1–6), the Israelites refuse to accept Moses' so-called tyranny, precisely because they are of Abraham's stock (ἐκ τῆς Ἀβράμου γενεᾶς). In Pauline theology,[204] the opposition between slavery and freedom is a fixed theme, but only in Gal 4,21–31 does it appear in connection with Abraham, and even there Abraham remains in the background, as has been pointed out earlier. In rabbinic literature, the connection between Abraham and freedom in the political and social sense is not a real issue, but according to a well known saying attributed to Rabbi Aqiba even the poorest in Israel are to be considered freemen (בני חורין), because they are sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*m. B. Qam.* 8,6).

In Isa 29,22, Abraham is associated with another aspect of slavery and freedom in the social sense, namely with the issue of paying ransom. According to Isaiah, God has 'ransomed' Abraham;[205] a rather puzzling remark, since in the Old Testament Abraham cycle there are no

203 H.C. Kee ('Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,' *OTP* 2. 777–778) argues that the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs was composed during the Maccabean period.

204 Cf. e.g. Rom. 6,6.20; 8,2.21; 1 Cor. 7,22; Gal 3,28.

205 The verb פדה used here is originally a term of commercial law, meaning 'to buy off, to ransom' (especially of slaves: cf. e.g. Lev 19,20; Deut 15,15; 24,18); it has come to mean 'to redeem' (cf. e.g. 2 Sam 4,9; Ps 26,11; 31,6; 34,23). LXX usually gives λυτρόω as the Greek translation.

references to Abraham being 'ransomed' or 'redeemed' by God.[206] Isaiah 29 testifies to God's redeeming actions for Israel, and in this context emphasizes that the salvation that is to come has already been foreshadowed by the salvation of the ancestor, Abraham.[207] Likewise, Psalm 105,14–15 goes back to the very origins of Israel by saying that God did not allow others to oppress and harm its ancestors and even punished kings for their sake. This remark probably alludes to the two stories about the *Gefährdung der Ahnfrau* in Gen 12,10–20 and Genesis 20. Both Isa 29,22 and Ps 105,14–15 use political and social terminology (ransom), but in Isa 29 this terminology seems to reach beyond the socio-political sphere into the picture of salvation and justice, and the sanctification of the God of Israel.

In some New Testament writings, especially in Luke, Abraham is associated with redemption and salvation. Luke interprets the salvation of Israel by the coming of the Messiah as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham (1,54–55.73–74), or as deliverance from the devil's grip: when Jesus heals the woman who was bent down, calling her 'daughter of Abraham' (13,16), he unties her from 'the bonds of Satan'. A similar idea is to be found in Heb 2,14–16: because of God's concern with the

206 Probably, this difficulty has been the reason that LXX reads 'the house of Jacob, which he set apart (among those) from Abraham.' MT and 1QIsa read: '(therefore so the Lord says) to the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham.' Old Testament scholars offer different suggestions to solve this problem. According to L.A. Snijders (*Jesaja* 1 [POT; Nijkerk: Callenbach,1969], 295–296), Isa 29,22 may reflect Gen 15,7; J.L. Vesco ('Abraham: actualisation et rélectures', *RvScPhTh* 55 [1971], 66) suggests that in Isa 29,22 Israel projects its own experiences on its forefather, while H. Wildberger (*Jesaja* [BKAT X/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982], 1143) considers Isa 29,22 to be a reference to Abraham's salvation in Gen 12,10–20 and Genesis 20. Kugel (*Bible*, 141–143) on the other hand, connects Isa 29,22 with the tradition that God rescued Abraham from the hands of his Chaldaean countrymen. Such a tradition is also implied in Jdt 5,8–9, *Jub.* 12,6–7, and Josephus *Ant.* 1.157 and *Ap.Const.* 8.12.12.

207 Cf. the use of the term 'to ransom/to redeem' in Isa 35,10 and 51,11, in the context of Israel's future return to Zion.

'seed of Abraham' (and not with the angels), His Son has delivered people bound by the devil, the power behind death and slavery.[208] The role of Abraham in relation to Israel's deliverance is also a common topic in rabbinic literature, and has been elaborated there in different ways: on the one hand, Abraham is a saviour, a man who saves particular groups of people (the upright; the circumcised children of Israel) from Gehenna; on the other hand, he is – at least partly – responsible for the oppression of his people in Egypt.[209]

Some passages in the Old Testament suggest that there is a link between the Exodus, Israel's salvation from the slavery in Egypt, and God's promise to Abraham. As we have pointed out before, this is already the case in the Abraham cycle itself, in Gen 15,13–14.[210] It also shows from Ps 105,26–42, where the psalmist pictures the plagues of Egypt and the Exodus as the fulfilment of God's holy word to Abra-

208 Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 8,2: the Lord vindicated Abraham's posterity, i.e. all those who believe as Abraham, by loosening them from bondage and calling them to salvation. The remarks of Irenaeus occur in the context of his polemic against Marcion, who excluded Abraham from the salvation by Christ.

209 These traditions are rather late. We mention some of them: *Kalla rabbati* 10.1, probably a corrupt text, suggests that 'the upright' in Ps 11,7 refers to Abraham, who brings deliverance for those condemned to Gehenna. According to b. '*Erubin* 19*a*, Ps 84,7 refers to Abraham who saves the circumcised sons of Israel from Gehenna. Of the sources in which Abraham is held partly responsible for the oppression of Israel we mention *Pesiq. r.* 15,2; *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 44.21; *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 51.7; all of them say that when Abraham had to choose between two kinds of punishment for his people, he preferred oppression by foreign empires over Gehenna. At the basis of this tradition lies Gen 15,12–14.

210 In fact, in Gen 15 there are two allusions to the Exodus. The first one (15,7) is indirect. Here Abraham's migration from Ur is referred to in terms typical for the deuteronomistic tradition about the Exodus: יצא hif'il + מן (cf. Exod 3,10.11; Num 15,41; Deut 4,20.37; 5,6.15 etc.) and ירשׁ + ארץ (cf. Deut 1,8; 2,31; 3,12.18.20 etc.). The author of Gen 15 probably intended to associate Abraham's migration with Israel's salvation; cf. C. Westermann, *Genesis* 2 (BKAT I/2; Neukrichen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 266. The reference to the Exodus in *vv* 13–14 is obvious, thanks to the terms 'to be slaves' (עבד), 'fourhundred years' and 'to go out' (יצא), are all typical for the Exodus tradition.

ham (*v*42). Rabbinic exegesis of Ps 105 and Exodus tends to strengthen the connection between the promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 and the Exodus of his descendants from Egypt.[211]

In sum, with regard to Abraham and freedom, in a broad spectrum of sources we find that in the social and political sense of the word Abraham is free and worthy. His status as free man means that his descendants are free and worthy as well, even if they are poor, as we read in the Mishna. In Isa 29,22 the reference to Abraham's being ransomed by God appears in the context of a vision of Israel's blissful future. Luke associates Abraham with the salvation of Israel by the coming of the Messiah as well as salvation from pain and death (for the latter, see also Hebrews). The salvation of Abraham's offspring from the slave house of Egypt is part of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 15); this connection between Abraham and the Exodus has been elaborated in rabbinic writings.

3.4. Abraham as seer (of the last things)

Many traditions about Abraham as a visionary have their background in Gen 15,1. Genesis 15 tells a mysterious story about a 'vision' (15,1),[212] in which the present is connected to the unknown and remote future.

211 Cf. various places in the *Mekilta*, especially Pisha 14–16. Pisha 14, line 35–37 interprets Exod 12,38 as the realisation of Gen 15,14. Pisha 14, line 54–63 harmonizes the four hundred thirty years of Exod 12,41 with the four hundred years of Gen 15,13; line 118–121 links the night of Pesah to the night in which God's has given Abraham his promise in Genesis 15. According to *Mekilta* Pisha 16,165–169, the departure from Egypt (Exod 13,4) is the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham; scriptural evidence for this interpretation is drawn from Ps 105,42. This association between Abraham and the Exodus occurs in other rabbinic writings as well, e.g. *Midr. Exod. Rab.* 3.3.10–11; *Midr. Deut. Rab.* 3.3; see also *Tg. J. Isa* 43,12. See note 191 for the association of Genesis 18 with the Exodus.

212 Cf. Kugel, *Bible*, 168–170.

The formulation of the covenant in Gen 15,18 echoes God's words about the future of Abraham's offspring in *vv*13–14. Interpretations of details of Genesis 15 in early Jewish writings tend to emphasize this aspect of the future. Pseudo-Philo for instance interprets the animals for the sacrifice (Gen 15,9) as symbols of actions which God will perform on behalf of Abraham in the distant future, such as the building of a city and the birth of wise men and prophets (*Bib. Ant.* 23,6–7). In *Bib. Ant.* 18,5 we find another reference to Abraham's vision, according to which God tells Balaam that he has spoken to Abraham in a vision, saying with regard to Israel: 'Your seed will be like the stars of heaven.' The remarkable thing in this text is that the quotation comes from Gen 22,17, whereas Abraham does not have a vision there. On the other hand, in the context of the vision of Abraham in Genesis 15 we find a reference to Abraham's future offspring that is very similar to Gen 22,17: 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to count them. (...) So shall be your seed.' In *Apoc. Abr.* 15–30, the story of Genesis 15 is interpreted from an eschatological viewpoint. On the wings of a pigeon Abraham is taken into heaven, whence he sees the seven heavens and the stars, and the earth with the Garden of Eden. He also has a vision of his future offspring being oppressed by the nations, because they have been provoking the Lord. Abraham witnesses the destruction of the Temple and the Last Judgment. After having had this vision, Abraham turns back on earth, where the other side of history is revealed to him: the ten plagues which God has prepared for the gentiles, the restoration of Israel and the victory which God's chosen one will bring about (31).[214] In 4 Ezra, Abraham is linked to eschatology as well: 4 Ezra 3,14 points out that Abraham is the only human being to see the end of times, in a vision given to him secretly by night (cf. Gen 15,5.12.17). Gen 15,7 obviously forms

213 See for a similar tradition Ps.-Clemens, *Recogn.* 1,12–13.

214 In *T. Abr.* A 10–14 Abraham has another vision, first of the present world (*T. Abr.* 10), then of heaven with its narrow (11) and its broad gate (12), where Abel judges the righteous and the sinners (13); cf. *T. Abr.* B 9–12.

the background of 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 4,4 given the remark that Abraham had a vision of the new Jerusalem 'in the night between the portions of the victims.' The eschatological interpretation of Genesis 15 continues to be part of the Targumim and other Jewish sources.[215]

Philo reads Abraham's vision in Genesis 15 in the light of *prophecy*. In *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit,*[216] his allegorical commentary on Gen 15,2–8, he explains the phenomenon of ecstasy. The best form of ecstasy is 'the divine possession or frenzy to which the prophets as a class are subject' (249), which is the kind of ecstasy that Abraham underwent (258). In Gen 20,7 it shows literally that Abraham was a prophet (*Her.* 258.263–266).[217]

Gen 18,1–17 is Philo's starting-point for another picture of Abraham

215 All Tgs. Gen 15,12, except *Targum Onqelos*, relate that Abraham saw in his sleep the four empires which would suppress his descendants; cf. *b. Menah.* 53b. To this *Mekilta* Bahodeš adds the splitting of the Red Sea, and the Temple with the order of sacrifices, all represented by the objects and animals of Gen 15,9.17. In *Midr. Gen. Rab.* 44.14 Abraham sees the sacrifices, whereas in 44,15 the three animals are interpreted as the kings of three foreign powers. According to *b. Meg.* 31b and *b. Ta'an.* 27b, Abraham asks about Israel's fate after the Temple cult will have ceased to exist. God replies that reading a section of the Torah will equally suffice for forgiving Israel's sins.

216 Cf. also *QG* 3.9.

217 Philo certainly shows himself a sensitive reader: in Genesis 15 Abraham does have the traits of a prophet. To begin with, it is a fixed part of prophecy that the word of God comes to the recipient/prophet (Gen 15,1; cf. e.g. 1 Sam 3,7; 15,10; 2 Sam 7,4; Jer 1,2.4.11.13; 2,1 etc.; Ezek 2,13; 3,16; 6,1 etc.). Secondly the word 'vision' (מחזה) in Gen 15,1 has a prophetic connotation.(cf. Num 24,4.16; Jer 14,14; 23,16; Ezek 13,7; cf. for the more current חזון e.g. Isa 1,1; 29,7; Ezek 12,22–24.27). Thirdly, the 'deep sleep' (תרדמה; Gen 15,12) also occurs in Isa 29,10, where it befalls the people of Jerusalem, and in Job 4,13 and 33,15, where it is connected with 'visions of the night'. LXX translates תרדמה in both Gen 2,21 and 15,12 as ἔκστασις. The Targumim translate the word 'vision' in MT Gen 15,1 as 'prophecy'; see *Tgs. Onq.*, *Neof.*, *Fr. Tg.* and *Sam. Tg.* recension A on Gen 15,1. Rabbinic writings generally base the idea of Abraham as a prophet on Gen 15 as well. *Midr. Gen.Rab.* 44.17 for instance interprets the 'deep sleep' of Gen 15,12 as the 'deep sleep' of prophecy. Like Philo, the rabbis use Gen 20,7 as further evidence for the idea that Abraham was a prophet (*b. B. Qam.* 92a = *b. Mak.* 9ab); they also refer to Gen 22,8 (*b. San.* 89b; another tradition in *Abot R.Nat. B* 43).

as a seer.[218] According to his literal interpretation of this passage, it is Sarah, and not Abraham, who discerns prophets or angels in the three visitors (*Abr.* 113). In the subsequent allegorical interpretation, the three men represent God as the triple appearance of his Being (ὁ ὤν) and his ministering powers, i.e. the Sovereign Power (named 'Lord'), and the Beneficial and Creative Power ('God') (*Abr.* 119–122).[219] The accomplished mind (that is: the sage) is able to see God as one vision. Given the fact that Abraham frequently sees the one God as three persons, he is still on the road to perfection (*Abr.* 122.125).[220]
Another symbolic reading of Genesis 18 is to be found in the Targumim. They acknowledge that Abraham was well aware of the Presence of God. According to *Fragm. Tg. and Tg. Neof.* Genesis 18,[221] the Word of the Lord was revealed to Abraham in the Plain of the Vision (cf. Gen 18,1). When later three angels in the form of men came to him, Abraham asked them to stay in order to prevent 'the glory of your Shekina' from going away from him (cf. Gen 18,3).

In Hebr 11,13 we find a secondary reference to Abraham's view of the future in the remark about the 'men of old' (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah [!]) mentioned in 11,1–12: 'These all died in faith,

218 In *Som.* 1.64–66 Philo interprets Gen 22,4 too in an allegorical way. 'Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off' means that he saw God ('place'), as well as God's pre-existent word.

219 Cf. *Mut.* 15–34, where Philo ascribes the name 'God' to God's creative power. Abraham sees God's creative power, not the Existent One himself (Mut. 17).

220 According to Philo, the idea of triple and single vision can be deduced from the literal story: Abraham sees three men, but talks to them as if they were one person (*Abr.* 131–132; cf. Gen 18,3); see for the same issue *QG* 4.2. Philo interprets Gen 18,16 in a similar way: the fact that Abraham escorted God and his powers means that he clung to God (*QG* 4.20); according to *Mig.* 174–175, Abraham has arrived at full knowledge and does not need the divine word as his leader or guide (ἡγεμόνος). Speculations about the appearance of God in Genesis 18 are also to be found in early Christian literature; see for instance Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 50.53.55.

221 Because of the relatively early date of *Targum Neofiti*, one may suppose that associations with the Divine Shekina may be dating from an earlier period and may therefore have been known in John's days.

not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on earth.'

In sum, we may conclude that the picture of Abraham as a visionary (cf. Genesis 15 and 18) was not uncommon in John's days. As to what Abraham actually saw in his vision one finds a great variety: Often Abraham has a vision of the future, which can take various forms: the Exodus, history of Israel, destruction of the Temple, the Last Judgement. In other texts Abraham sees or is aware of the Divine presence: Philo argues that Abraham saw God's Essence, *Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Tg. Neof.* Gen 18,3 say that Abraham was aware of God's Shekina. Thus Abraham is witness to the great events of Israel's history and expresses the believer's awe for and awareness of the presence of God. Apart from being a visionary, Abraham is sometimes described as being a prophet: literally in Genesis 20,7, with reference to both Genesis 15 and Gen 20,7 in some of Philo's works.

3.5. The joy of Abraham

Although Genesis does not speak about Abraham's joy or 'gladness', the issue does play a role in writings prior to or contemporary with John. In most cases, descriptions of his joy are reinterpretations of the Abraham's 'laughter' in Gen 17,17. The obvious reason for this reinterpretation of laughter as joy or rejoicing was the embarrassment about Abraham's sceptical reaction at God's promise that he was to have a son by Sarah (Gen 17,16). Thus, instead of 'then Abraham fell on his face and ***laughed***, and said to himself (...),' *Jub.* 15,17 reads: 'And Abraham fell on his face and he ***rejoiced*** and pondered in his heart (...).' Similar examples of handling the embarrassment about Gen 17,17 are to be found in the Targumim. *Tg. Neofiti* I and *Tg. Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Fragmentary Tg.* on Gen 17,17 have 'and he won-

dered,' whereas *Tg. Onqelos* reads 'and he rejoiced.' Philo on the other hand does leave the verb 'to laugh' intact and treats the issue in other ways. We have already pointed out his interpretation of Gen 17,17 in *Mut.* 177–178 (see section 2.2.); in *L.A.* 3.217–218, Philo makes Gen 17,17 less disturbing by saying that Abraham seems to rejoice and to laugh, ***because*** Isaac will be born, and that the child is 'laughter and joy'.[222] In *QG* 3.55, Philo connects the laughter of Gen 17,17 with the promise and vision which Abraham had just before: he laughs for joy, because he hopes and expects that God's promise will be fulfilled. Moreover, Abraham is glad because of the 'clear vision' he just had (cf. *Mut.* 154[223]).

Although the reference to Abraham's joy in *Jub.* 14,21 bears a remote resemblance to the idea expressed in *QG* 3.55, in *Jubilees* Abraham's joy is a reaction to the promise of Genesis 15 and not to the promise of Genesis 17. Abraham is said to rejoice (*Jub.* 14,21) after he has had

222 In *Abr.* 201, Philo explains the Hebrew name Isaac, 'he laughs' as 'feeling of well-being', 'joy'. In Gen 22 Abraham offers his 'joy' to God, for joy has its place in God (*Abr.* 202); cf. *Bib. Ant.* 40,2, where Abraham rejoices over the sacrifice of Isaac. A fragment of a Targum found in the Genizah of Cairo (Cambridge University Library MS T-S B 8.9, folio 2) also connects Abraham's joy with Gen 22: Abraham 'joyfully' built the altar on which he was to sacrifice Isaac.

223 In *Mut.* 167–168 we find an elaboration of Exod 4,14, in which Philo says that joy befell Moses at the presence of the divine messenger. This elaboration is embedded in a discourse about the joy of Abraham and Sarah at the divine promise of Genesis 17. As to Abraham's joy itself, Philo remarks that it is the joy which befalls the virtuous alone (*Mut.* 175).

224 Berger (*Jubiläen*, 404) remarks about *Jub.* 14,21: 'Da die Freude auf die Verheissung von Kap XIV [=*Jubilees*] bezogen ist, kann man annehmen, daß Joh 8,56 (Jubel Abrahams über das Sehen des Tages des Messias) auf diesen Text oder eine nah verwandte Tradition bezogen ist.' See also R. le Déaut (***Targum du Pentateuque. Traduction des deux recensions palestiniennes complètes avec introduction, parallèles, notes et index***, Tome I Genèse [SC 245; Paris: Cerf, 1978), 183 n.9) about Tg. *Ps.-J.* Gen 17,17: "Noter la recension de O: 'il se réjouit' (hdy). Dans l'allusion de Jn 8,56 à la joie d'Abraham voyant le jour du Messie, il y a un rappel des visions de Gen. 15 (cf. *Jubilés* 14,21), mais peut-être aussi de la joie de l'annonce d'un descendant (*Jubilés* 15,17)."

the vision and promise of Genesis 15 (=*Jub.* 14.1–20).[224] However, in *Jubilees* Abraham's joy usually concerns his offspring, his sons (Isaac and Ishmael) and his beloved grandson Jacob.[225]

In some in early Jewish writings, the joy of Abraham relates to events in the distant future, even the eschaton. This is the case in *T. Levi* 18,14, which says that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will rejoice at the coming of the messianic priest,[226] and in *T. Benj.* 10,6, in which we find the promise that those faithfully observing the commandments shall see Enoch and Seth, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 'raised up at the right hand in great joy.'[227]

In sum, we may say that the joy of Abraham as such does not occur in Genesis. However, Abraham's laughter in Gen 17,17 about the promise of a son by Sarah has been interpreted that way in *Jubilees* and the Targumim. Philo regards Isaac himself as Abraham's joy, but he also associates this joy with the promise of Isaac's birth and the vision in which the promise was revealed. *Jubilees* mentions Abraham's joy in the context of the promise of Genesis 15. In the *Testament of the Twelve*

225 The fact that both his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, are with him is a reason for Abraham's joy at the festival of Shavuot. At this occasion Isaac sacrifices a thank offering and makes 'a feast of joy' before his brother (*Jub.* 22,1.4). In a previous chapter, Abraham had rejoiced for his sons and his seed, that they may inherit the land (17,2–3). There are some references in *Jubilees* to Abraham's observing Sukkot, a feast of joy and rejoicing (16,20), but this 'joy' has more to do with the character of the feast itself than with Abraham's state of mind. It should be noted that Sukkot also forms the background of John 8,31–59.

226 The sequel of the verse runs: '...and I [Levi] shall be glad, and all the saints shall be clothed in righteousness.' We find the same eschatological joy in *vv* 5.12 of this hymn.

227 In *Jub.* 23,9–32, an interpolation referring to the future judgment, we find that the 'servants' of the Lord will drive out their enemies, whereupon 'the righteous ones will see and give praise/and rejoice forever and ever with joy; (...) and their bones will rest in the earth/and their spirits will increase joy (...)'(*Jub.* 23,30–31). Obviously Abraham's joy in 14,21 is part of the vocabulary of *Jubilees* for describing God's work in the future.

Patriarchs we find references to the joy of Abraham in an eschatological context. Apart from John 8,56, the theme is absent from the New Testament.

3.6. The death of Abraham

Abraham's death, referred to in John 8,52–53, is attested in Genesis itself. Abraham died in good old age and was gathered to his people (Gen 25,8), in accordance with the God's promise (Gen 15,15).[228] Although Genesis 25,8 takes Abraham's death literally and does not dwell on it, it has been the point of departure of a number of speculations. According to *Jub.* 23,1–2 for instance, Abraham died during Shavuot, after having blessed his grandson Jacob, with the boy still lying at his bosom.[229] *Jubilees* takes the death of Abraham literally and does not speculate about his afterlife, but in other sources the issue is more prominent and sometimes rather spectacular in its elaboration. According to the *Testament of Abraham* recension A, when the time of Abraham's death is near and the archangel Michael is sent for him (ch. 9 and 15), Abraham refuses to come with him. Then Death himself appears and finally seizes Abraham (20,9). After having tended his dead body and escorted his soul to heaven (20,10–12), Michael and the angels receive orders from God to take Abraham to paradise (20,14). In recension B it is Isaac who announces Abraham's death (7,4–14). While Abraham refuses to leave without his body (7,18), death is forced to come in disguise. God draws out Abraham's soul and Michael takes it into heaven.

Some unconnected remarks about the death of Abraham are to be found in Philo and the *Testament of Judah.* Philo argues that Abraham

228 A secondary reference to Abraham's death is to be found in Gen 26,18: 'And Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham (...).'

229 See for an exposition about Abraham's lifespan, *Jub.* 23,8–10.

inherited eternity and became like the angels (*Sacr.* 5).[230] In *T. Judah* 25,1 it is said that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob shall be raised to life after the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament we also find some casual remarks about the death and afterlife of Abraham. According to Matthew and Luke, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 8,11–12; Luke 13,28). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16,19–31) the role of Abraham after death is more pronounced. After poor Lazarus has died, angels carry him to Abraham's bosom (*v*23). But after the rich man has died, he finds himself ending up in Hades, from where he sees Lazarus at the bosom of Abraham.[231] Hebr 11,13 simply says that Abraham and the other ancestors of Israel 'died in faith.' Abraham's death continues to be a point of discussion for the rabbis. Allusions to the topic in the Babylonian Talmud are quite diverse.[232]

In sum, in both the Old Testament and *Jubilees* Abraham's death is taken literally, as well as in Hebrews. An interesting story about the circumstances of Abraham's death is to be found in the *Testament of Abraham*, which shows his reluctance to part from his earthly life. In the

230 Philo also mentions the death of Abraham in *Sobr.* 17 and *Her.* 291.

231 The idea of the patriarch(s) being in heaven to receive the righteous occurs in 4 Macc 13,17 as well:"After our death in this fashion [=martyrdom] Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will receive us, and all our forefathers will praise us."

232 In *b. Ber.* 18b-19b it says that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are alive; this reading of Deut 34,4 as an exhortation to Moses to tell the patriarchs that the promise to their descendants has been fulfilled, implies that the patriarchs are still alive. *b. Mo'ed Qat.* 29a quotes Gen 15,15 as an example of words which should not be used to bid farewell to the living. Gen 24,1 forms the background of a haggadah in *b. Sota* 5a saying that if the haughty becomes humble, he shall be gathered like Abraham. *b. Roš. Haš.* 10b-11a offers a discussion about the importance of Tishri and Nisan. In order to emphasize their importance, it is argued that Abraham died in one of these two months. According to *Derek Erets Zuta* 1,17, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Aaron, Miriam and Amram 'have gone to their eternal rest with great honour and worms and maggots had no dominion over them;' see for a slightly different version *Kalla R.* 3,26.

end however, the archangel Michael takes Abraham's soul to paradise. About Abraham's afterlife we find various interpretations: he became like the angels (Philo), he is in heaven (Matthew and Luke), where he receives poor people like Lazarus and judges the rich man (Luke). The *Testament of Judah* mentions Abraham's resurrection with the coming of the Messiah. All these traditions however, take Abraham's death as a matter of fact.

3.7. Conclusions

As we have seen in our research into the aspects of the figure of Abraham that occur in John 8,31–59, first century Judaism knew a wide range of interpretations of Abraham. What we have seen and discussed is only part of a much greater variety of traditions concerning Abraham. As to the material we have discussed, the conclusion seems justified that since the separate components of the Johannine image of Abraham proved to have parallels in other texts, they are not original in themselves, but obviously embedded in traditional views. For the moment we are unable to
decide precisely if and how the components of John's picture of Abraham are related to existing texts and/or traditions. The same is true of the Johannine picture of Abraham as a whole: the question how precisely John's 'Abrahamology' relates to the 'Abrahamology' of the Second Temple period in general must remain undecided for the moment. In the next chapter we will investigate how the various aspects of John's picture of Abraham relate to existing texts and/or traditions.

4

THE PICTURE OF ABRAHAM IN JOHN 8,31–59

In the preceding two chapters, we have analysed the role of Abraham within our pericope and looked for parallels between John's presentation of Abraham and texts from the Old Testament, New Testament and early Jewish literature, with an occasional reference to rabbinic and patristic writings. The purpose of the present chapter is to reconsider the Johannine depiction (see the close reading in chapter 2) of Abraham in the light of the traditions and writings about Abraham described in chapter 3. More specifically, the present chapter aims at investigating which parallel texts help to explain John, either as its actual sources or as other representatives of a common tradition or motif. This selection should enable us to get a clearer picture of John's religious and theological background, and to evaluate his position within the Jewish tradition(s) of his days. In doing so, the question is not only *whether* John used existing traditions about Abraham, but also *how* he used them and *why* he did so. This does not necessarily mean that the evangelist – whoever he might have been – set down to take a text or tradition in an attempt to mould it according to his own ideology in the way modern propagandists are in the habit of doing. But even if he did, we must bear in mind what J.L. Kugel writes: '(...) even in the case of blatantly ideological interpretations, it is usually quite difficult to decide whether a given interpreter set out to patrol all of Scripture in search of a place to 'plant' an expression of his own ideology, or whether, on the contrary, faced with a particular exegetical stimulus in the biblical text (...) the interpreter came up with an explanation that, in one way or another, also reflected his own ideology or the issues of his day.'[233] Moreover, one should reckon with

233 Kugel, *Bible*, 26.

the fact that interpreters did not read the Biblical text as it was, but already read this text as an *interpreted* text. As a result of the existence of a manifold of interpretations, their own exegesis often reflects more than just one interpretation.[234]

The present chapter consists of three sections. In section 1 we shall weigh which traditions and sources are the most relevant for the interpretation of John 8,31–59, and, if possible, which ones were actually used by John. In this context, we shall also consider proposals by modern scholars. As in chapter 2, the subdivision of this section will be parallel to the structure of our pericope as described in chapter 1. In section 2 we shall give a concluding summary of the findings of section 1 with regard to the provenance of John's picture of Abraham. In section 3 we shall seek to give some – tentative – answers to the question whether the Johannine picture of Abraham is a collection of unrelated elements, which have become a unity because of John's own christological reasoning, or if these elements are interrelated in other ways as well.

4.1. John 8,31–59: traditions in the Johannine context

As we have seen before in chapter 1 and 2, John 8,31–59 can be divided into two parts, each of them consisting of a number of closely entwined arguments and themes: the identity of the Jews (*vv*31–47; section 4.1.1. below) and the identity of Jesus (*vv*48–58[59]; section 4.1.2 below). In the first part, Abraham appears in connection with the issue of sonship, in the second part with the issues of death and

234 Kugel (*Bible*, 30) refers to Josephus as an example: 'In a great many instances, therefore, Josephus' retellings of biblical stories are most likely an amalgam of things he has learned from different sources—indeed, at times he himself may not always be aware that what he is telling is interpretation and not, or not necessarily, a straightforward duplication of the biblical text alone.'

eternal life, and pre-existence. In chapter 2 of this study it has become clear that the Johannine references to Abraham serve a double purpose: they distinguish between his true adherents and so-called believers, and emphasize and support the pre-eminence and pre-existence of Jesus. In our pericope, John argues that Abraham's children are people who imitate his deeds, thereby implying that the interlocutors of Jesus cannot be Abraham's true children, even if they are his physical offspring.

4.1.1. Part one, John 8,31–47: Who are οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι?

In the first part, John 8,31–47, Jewish descent from Abraham is connected with other issues: freedom and slavery (*vv*31–37), childhood and imitation (*vv*38–41a), belief in God as related to belief in Jesus (*vv*31.41b–47). As in chapter 2, in the present chapter these issues will be treated in separate sections, following the structure of the pericope.

4.1.1.1. Part one, first argument: freedom and slavery (vv31–37)

According to the Jews in John 8,33, there is an obvious link between descent from Abraham and freedom: σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐσμεν καὶ οὐδενὶ δεδουλεύκαμεν πώποτε. As we have seen in the previous chapter of this study, in the Old Testament and early Jewish literature the self-designation 'seed of Abraham' (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ) is the designation proper of Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob. As we have noted, this designation is not a neutral term merely indicating physical descent; it has the connotation of election, being children of the promise and having a special position before God.[235] From the viewpoint of

235 For the idea that God's promise to Abraham reflects on his seed, cf. e.g. Isa 41,8 and Ps 105,6; *Jub* 16,17–18 focuses on the fact that Jacob was elected; cf. also Ps. *Sol* 9,9; 18,3.

the protagonists in John 8,33, being σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ means being free from slavery; therefore they do not need to become free: πῶς σὺ λέγεις ὅτι ἐλεύθεροι γενήσεσθε. We have also noted in chapter 3 that neither the Jewish appeal to descent from Abraham as a guarantee for salvation, nor the criticism of this appeal in John 8,34–37 are unique.

In first-century Judaism the term 'freedom' in itself has political, sociological and religious connotations. The political sense of the word prevails in Josephus' account of the Jewish war of 66–70 C.E. (e.g. *J. W.* 7.255; *Ant.* 18.4),[236] whereas its social aspect in the sense of 'being free men', 'being of noble birth' is voiced in *T. Napht.* 1.10 and Philo's *Sobr.* 56–57,[237] and in the famous passage in the Mishna (*m. B. Qam.* 8,6) which says that even the poor in Israel are like freemen, since they are sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A number of texts interpret religious freedom as serving God and keeping the commandments of the Torah.[238] 2 *Apoc. Bar* 85,3–4.7 for instance states that although Israel has lost its land and Zion, it still has the Mighty One and the Torah and therefore kept 'its spirit of the power of its liberty'.[239]

In texts where 'freedom' is associated with *Abraham*, one can distinguish three tendencies:[240] Abraham is 1) the guarantee of political and social freedom; 2) the reason and guarantee for redemption; 3) the

236 These texts are pointed out in S. Motyer, *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and 'the Jews'* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 171. See also his references to *Ant.* 18.23 for the definition of Zealot philosophy and *J.W.* 2.348–349; 355–356; 3.357.367; 5.395–396 for the concurrence of 'freedom' and 'slavery'.

237 Hollander, '"Vrijheid"', 270.

238 Motyer, *Your Father*, 173; H.E. Lona, *Abraham in Johannes 8. Ein Beitrag zur Methodenfrage*, (EHS, R.23. Bd. 65; Bern/Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1976), 318–319.

239 Cf. *m. 'Abot* 3,7: 'Every one who receives upon him the yoke of Torah, they remove from him the yoke of the Kingdom and the yoke of wordly occupation," and *m. 'Abot* 6,2: "None is your freeman, but he who is occupied with study of Torah."

240 Chapter 3 of this study, section 3.3.

person on whose behalf the Exodus took place. With regard to John 8,33, modern scholars tend to neglect the first and third association in favour of the religious and spiritual reading of this verse,[241] especially in favour of freedom as the observance of the Torah.[242] Consequently, they tend to regard John 8,31–36 as a discussion about the observance and understanding of the Law. However, such an understanding of freedom is hardly compatible with the christological character of the debate and John's predominant view of the Torah as a witness to Jesus.[243] In John 8,33, the Jews oppose Jesus primarily because he claims to be the source of freedom (8,31–32), not because they regard him as transgressing or invalidating the prescripts of the Law. The discussions about the Law and Christian freedom in the Pauline letters are so different from the discussion in John,[244] that it is difficult to see them as a parallel to or explanation of John 8,33. The way in which the Jews in *v*33 trace back their freedom to Abraham makes more sense when we read it in social and/or political terms. Josephus (*Ant.* 4.1–6), Philo (*Sobr.* 56–57) and *Testament Naphtali* (1,10) all point out the fact that Abraham was a free and/or noble man. In *J.W.* 7.323–324 Josephus writes how Eleazar, the leader of the Zealots/Sicarii at Massada, reminds his companions that 'we determined neither to serve the Romans nor any other save God, for He alone is man's true and righteous Lord; and now the time is come which bids us verify that resolution by our actions. At this crisis let us not disgrace ourselves; we who in the past refused to submit even to a slavery involving no

241 Cf. Lagrange, *Saint Jean*, 243; Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 2.263 (referring to *m. B. Qam.* 8,6); Motyer, 173.

242 Cf. Odeberg , *Fourth Gospel*, 296–297; Bultmann, *Johannes*, 336; Barrett, St. John, 344; Lona, *Abraham*, 318–319; Motyer, *Your Father*, 174, also Th. B. Dozeman ('Sperma Abraam in John 8 and Related Literature, Cosmology and Judgement', *CBQ* 42 (1980) 342–358, p. 355).

243 John's treatment of halakic issues in John 5 is illustrative. The discussion begins about breaking the sabbath, but soon turns into a debate about the nature of the Scriptures and the role of Moses.

244 Cf. Hollander, "'Vrijheid'", 265–266.274.

peril, let us not now, along with slavery, deliberately accept the irreparable penalties awaiting us if we are to fall into Roman hands.' Eleazar's reference to the slaveries of the past, to which they have refused to submit, raises the question whether he does not ignore his own people's history. As to John, the allusion to Gen 15,13–14 in 8,33 suggests that the opponents of Jesus do so indeed.[245] A literal interpretation of 'freedom' in John 8,33 is also preferable from the perspective of John's style of rhetoric. One of the characteristics of John's style is the misunderstanding between the parties, based upon the collision between different levels of meaning of a word or concept. In *vv* 32–33 we find a classic example of it: Jesus understands 'freedom' in the theological and spiritual sense (*vv* 31–32) of freedom from sin, whereas his opponents understand it in the literal sense (*v* 33). Any spiritual interpretation of freedom in *v* 33 would weaken the intended tension of the entire passage of John 8,31–37.[246] By putting the phrase 'we have *never* (πώποτε) been slaves to anyone' on the lips of these Jews, the evangelist makes a caricature of their idea of freedom.

At this stage of the discussion, the designation σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ and its traditional implications, – being elected, taking part in God's pro-

245 Cf. J.H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (ICC; ed. A.H. McNeile; Edinburgh: Clark, 1929), 306, and Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A. Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 157. Bernard – rather bluntly – states that the Jews lie about their history. 'Lying' does not seem the right word here: Jesus does not so much stress the falsity of what his interlocutors say, but the absurdity of it; cf. John 19,15, where the chief priests declare that they have no king but Caesar.

246 Hollander ('Vrijheid', 269) refers to an analogous reasoning in Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 4.1.7–10: '...When you tell him the truth, namely: "You do not differ in anything from people who have been sold thrice, you are a slave yourself as well," what can you expect besides physical punishment? He will say: 'How so, me a slave?' My father was a free man, my mother was a free woman, and nobody ever bought me. No, I am a member of the Senate, a friend of the emperor, I have been a consul and I have many slaves.' The misunderstanding in Epictetus is between independence in the sense of individual ethics and freedom and slavery in the social sense.

mise to Abraham and in the covenant – are not yet at issue. Whatever the Jewish interpretation of 'freedom' in view of Abraham may be, in connection with σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ it always hinges on God's election of and promise to him and his people after him. The election of Abraham is the beginning of the history of Israel, the history of the Jewish people and God, the history of salvation.

In *vv*34–36, John takes another rhetorical step in criticizing the link between physical descent (*v*33.37) from Abraham and election through Abraham (cf. *vv*38–41a). *V*35 is the key verse between these references to Abraham, with its ***Bildwort*** about a household in which the son and heir holds a permanent, but the slave only a temporary place. In chapter 2 we already sketched some of the problems with regard to this verse. A closer look into the picture of *v*35 may help to understand the connection between *v*34 and *v*35, as well as the effect of applying *vv*34–35 to the identity and beliefs of Jesus' opponents in *v*37.

*V*35 reflects the habit in John's days to regard slaves as part of the family.[248] Because the discussion in John 8,31–59 is about descent from Abraham (*v*33–41a), one may suppose that the 'house' (οἰκία) in *v*35 refers to the household or family of Abraham.[249] The term 'house' as 'house of Abraham' repeatedly occurs in biblical and early Jewish literature. Gen 14,14, 15,2–3, 17,13–23, and 24,2 refer to Abraham's household, including his servants and slaves. The referen-ce in Gen 18,19 seems particularly appropriate for the understanding of John 8,35: God has chosen Abraham so 'that he may charge his sons [children] and his house after him (MT ואת־בניו ואת־ביתו אחריו LXX τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτου καὶ τῷ οἰκῷ αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτόν) to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice.' In *Jub.* 22,24 'house of Abraham' is even synonymous with Jacob and his offspring.

247 See Isa 29,22; Ps 105, 14–15; Luke 1,54–55.73–74.

248 Schnackenburg, ***Johannesevangelium*** 2.265, n. 2. According to Exod 21,2–6 and Deut 15,12–18, Hebrew slaves were to be released after six years of slavery.

249 Cf. Hollander, "'Vrijheid'", 273.

Some scholars compare Gal 4,30 with the picture in John 8,35.[250] Galatians quotes Gen 21,10, the words by which Sarah tries to convince Abraham to cast out the son of the slave (בן־האמה: LXX ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης) in favour of her own son, the son of the promise. Although the context and arguments in John and Galatians are different – Paul treats the issue of slavery and freedom as a matter of descent and heirship under the Law, not as a matter of christology, as John does[251] – the picture of Genesis 21 seems to fit John 8,35 to a certain extent. The implication of taking Gen 21,10 as the background of John 8,35 is that in John's view Jesus' interlocutors are slaves and therefore do not permanently belong to the house of Abraham.[252] Genesis 21, however, is not the only text that focuses on the issue of Abraham's heir in relation to other members of his household. In both Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 we find the same issue.

Genesis 15 focuses on the question of who will be Abraham's heir. At this moment in his life, Abraham is still childless and very much concerned that one of his servants, the Damascene Eliezer, will be his heir (15,2–3): 'See, you have not given me seed, and a son of my house will inherit (from) me (הן לי לא נתתה זרע והנה בן־ביתי יורש אתי).' Then the word of JHWH comes to Abraham reassuring him that not Eliezer will be his heir, but a child 'coming forth from your own body' (אשר יצא ממעיך, Gen 15,4).

According to Genesis 17, every male individual in Abraham's house must be circumcised, whether they are Abraham's 'seed' (*v*10), men born in his house, or 'bought from any foreigner' (*v*12, cf. *v*27). Circumcision is the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (*v*10–11), a sign to be continued in Abraham's seed after him (*v*7).

250 Cf. for instance Barrett, *St. John*, 346; Becker, *Evangelium* 1. 303; Brown, *John*, 1. 363; P. Grelot, 'Jean 8,56 et Jubilés 16,16-29', *RevQ* 13 (1988) 621–628, p. 628.

251 Note that in Galatians 4,30 the mothers are the central figures, not Abraham; cf. chapter 3 section 3.1. of this study.

252 Cf. Hollander, "'Vrijheid'", 273.

Having no son by Sarah, Abraham asks God to have Ishmael live before Him (*v*18), whereupon God repeats his promise that Sarah shall have a son with whom He shall establish an everlasting covenant, 'for his seed after him' (*v*19). According to *vv*23–27, Abraham, his son Ishmael, and every other male individual in his household are circumcised on the very same day.

Both Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 mention the family and household of Abraham, raise the question who will be Abraham's heir and refer to his 'seed' and/or his 'son' and to his slave or slaves. There are obvious differences between the texts: the competition in Genesis 15 is between a stranger and Abraham's future offspring, in Genesis 17 between his son by Hagar, Ishmael (who in *v*23 is explicitly called Abraham's 'son'), and Abraham's son by Sarah. In Genesis 17, the term 'slave' (LXX δοῦλος; MT עבד) itself does not occur, nor does the reference to the servants in *vv*12–13.23 include Ishmael. As long as Ishmael is the only physical son of Abraham, he is Abraham's heir. Gen 15,4 designates the heir as 'he who will be coming forth from you' LXX ὃς ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ σοῦ; MT אשר יצא ממך), while the expression 'to be slaves' in *v*13 ('they will be slaves': MT יעבדום; LXX 'they will make them slaves': δουλώσουσιν αὐτοὺς) does not relate to Abraham's household, but to the slavery of his future offspring in Egypt. The question who will be Abraham's heir is prominent in both Genesis 15 and 21. In Genesis 15 we find the word 'house', the word that in John in 8,35 indicates the position of the son and the slave, with reference to Abraham's household in the context of the question who will be the heir. In Genesis 21 the uncertainty comes to an end: there is only one heir, Isaac, and the son of Hagar, Ishmael, must give up his place. In John we again meet descendants of Abraham. The fact that they do not allow Jesus to make them free, makes them into slaves who have no permanent place in his house (*v*35).[253] John does not question their

253 The reference to Abraham's belief in Gen 15,6 [LXX: καὶ ἐπίστευσεν Αβραμ τῷ θεῷ] may also play a role at the background of John 8,31.

descent from Abraham's in the physical sense (*v* 37), but he does question their position as permanent members of Abraham's house. What comes to the open in John 8,38–41a is already present in John 8, 31–37: would-be believers of Jesus are non-believers and as such they do not permanently belong to the house of Abraham.[254]

4.1.1.2. *Part one, second argument: Abraham as the father of* οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι (*vv* 38–41a)

According to John 8,39, children of Abraham should act as their father Abraham has done. The behaviour of Jesus' adversaries presents a problem, since their intention to kill him contradicts their claim to be Abraham's descendants (σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, *v* 37). Therefore the evangelist concludes that they are would-be children of Abraham (*vv* 39–41a) and belong to the devil (*v* 44). They may stem from Abraham in the physical sense (Οἶδα ὅτι σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐστε, *v* 37), but do not really belong to him in the ethical and religious sense.

As we have seen in chapter 3, the Johannine distinction between 'seed of Abraham' (*vv* 33.37) and 'children of Abraham' (*vv* 39–41a) has no obvious precedent. The author of 4 Maccabees uses the terms 'sons', 'daughter', 'children' and 'seed' without discrimination.[255] In Luke, 'seed of Abraham' occurs as the traditional reference to Israel (1,55), while 'son' of Abraham (19,19) and 'daughter' of Abraham (13,16) are used for repenting sinners and suffering pious individuals in order to stress that they too belong to God's people.[256] The Pauline writings

254 Cf. Hollander ("'Vrijheid'", 273–274). Hollander's article is about John 8,31–36 and does not take into consideration the ambiguity of *v* 37.

255 'Son' (4 Macc 9,21), 'daughter' (15,28), 'children' (παῖδες, 6,17–22), cf. 4 Macc 18,1: Ὦ τῶν Ἀβραμιαίων σπερμάτων ἀπόγονοι παῖδες Ἰσραηλῖται.

256 Cf. Luke 16,19–31, where Abraham is mentioned in the context of God's compassion with Lazarus.

take the inclusion even further by extending kinship of Abraham to non-Jews: in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 Paul repeatedly argues that Gentiles who believe in Jesus are children of Abraham and people of the promise as well. The difference between Paul/Luke and John is that to Paul and Luke words like 'son', 'daughter' and 'children' of Abraham are terms of inclusion, whereas John uses 'children' as a term of distinction and exclusion.

With regard to John 8,38–41a, we have also pointed out that criticism of Jews claiming Abraham's fatherhood is not exclusively Johannine. It has its precedent in Isa 63,16 and bears resemblance to Matt 3,7–10/Luke 3,7–9, where John the Baptist, criticizing the easy reliance on Abraham and the false certainty of some among his audience, argues that without repentance for one's sins such a reliance is worthless. Like Matthew and Luke, John appears to oppose the concept of Abraham as an automatic guarantee for salvation. Like them, the urges his audience to change their attitude. But the fundamental difference with Matthew and Luke is that he breaks up the religious and ethical bonds between Abraham and the (Jewish) adversaries of Jesus. The reason for the rupture is their double disregard of Abraham consisting in their doing the works that he did not do (i.e. seeking to kill God's emissary), and abstaining from doing the works that he did.

With regard to the works of Abraham, we have seen that Jewish writings prior to 200 C.E., as well as texts from the Tannaitic and Amoraic period, frequently mention specific good deeds of Abraham: his obedience to the word of God, the binding of Isaac, his observance of

257 See chapter 3, section 3.2.2. Cf. Bultmann, *Johannes*, 339 n. 4, about Abraham's obedience; for the binding of Isaac, see Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 2, 284, and F. J. Leenhardt, 'Abraham et la conversion de Paul de Tarse, suivi d'une note sur "Abraham dans Jean VIII"', *RHPR* 53 (1973), 351. Leenhardt argues that John 8,40, 'this is *not* what Abraham did' (italics CCMdL) refers to the fact that Abraham did *not* sacrifice his son. This interpretation (*continued on next page*)

the Law, his faith, his hospitality.[257] On the other hand, the number of references to Abraham's deeds in general is very limited: in *Jub.* 3,10 we find a reference to his righteousness and his perfection toward the Lord, in 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 57,2 to 'works of the commandments' having been accomplished in Abraham's time and generation. John refers to Abraham's works in terms of what they are not, i.e. the intention to kill Jesus, who speaks the truth that he heard from God. When turned into the affirmative, 'Abraham's works' in John 8,39 are obviously related to or even synonymous with the reception of Jesus, God's emissary. John's reference to Abraham's works is part of the framework of *vv* 31–47 in which the truth revealed through Jesus (*vv* 31–32.43–45) and belief in Jesus (*vv* 31.45) are principal motifs.

John's understanding of Jesus as the mediator and personification of divine truth (ἀλήθεια, *v* 40, cf. 14,6) may echo speculations in contemporary Jewish exegesis, especially those about the three visitors to Abraham in Genesis 18. Philo for instance, understands Genesis 18 as the story about God's self-revelation to Abraham in which He shows him his Being and administering Powers (Abr. 22.25). Given the fact that in some of his writings Philo describes the Logos as the first emanation from the divine Being, bringing together God's Sovereign and Creative Powers, some scholars understand the visit of the three men as the appearance of the divine Logos.[258] A similar interpretation is to be found in *Targum Neofiti,* where Abraham's guests are identified with the divine Presence, the Shekina (*Tg. Neof.* Gen 18,3), and God is said to speak to Abraham through his Word (*Tg. Neof.* Gen 18,17.19).

seems to be against tenor of Genesis 22 itself. Abraham is praised *because* he was willing to sacrifice his son, as a sign of absolute faith in God, not despite of it. Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel,* 341) refers to Sir 44,19–21 as a possible background of John 8,39. Sirach mentions Abraham because of his keeping the Law, his circumcision as a sign of the covenant and the binding of Isaac.

258 So A.T. Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel. A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 126–131, and L. Urban and M. Patrick, '"Before Abraham Was I Am": Does Philo Explain John 8:56–58?' *St. Philon.* 6 (1979s), 157–195. Urban and Patrick point out *Cher.* 27–28 in particular (*Before Abraham,* 174).

Other Targumim, dating from a later period, also identify the visitors as the divine Presence.[259] Another interesting point in Philo is that in receiving the three men Abraham proved his piety towards God (θεοσέβεια; *Abr.* 114). It may very well be that John 8,39–40 is another, perhaps less outspoken, variety of a strain of interpretation of Genesis 18 which regarded Abraham's reception of the three men as a sign of his exemplary belief and piety.

The Johannine picture of Abraham as the man accepting the divine truth revealed to him through God's emissary, is consistent with the contemporary image of Abraham as the man of faith[260] who believed in the one true God and proved enduringly faithful by his deeds and good works. His status as the exemplary believer in the one God in particular may account for the fact that he cannot be the father of the interlocutors of Jesus in John 8,31–59; moreover, John's own reasoning in *v* 31 and *vv* 45.46 makes it very probable that Abraham's belief in itself is the reason for his occurrence in *vv* 39–41a. Abraham believed and accepted the divine truth; his descendants in John 8 do not accept Jesus, the divine truth personified (vv. 31.45.46). In John's view, belief in God not only excludes rejecting Jesus, it implies belief in Jesus. Because Abraham is the exemplary believer in God, he cannot be the father of those who do not believe. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in Pauline theology the issue of Abraham's belief is

259 Cf. Brown, *John* 1.357; Hanson interprets both John 8,39–40 and 8,56–57 in the light of Genesis 18 and argues that John understood one of the men who appeared to Abraham to be the pre-existent Logos.

260 According to Motyer, however, John 8,40 does not refer to Abraham's faith 'in a more abstract (or Lutheran) sense'. John's 'implied reader' would understand Abraham's faith as faithfulness under trial. Motyer reads John 8,40 as a reference to one of Abraham's works, i.e. his hospitality (*Your Father,* 191–192). With his remark about the issue of Abraham's faith, Motyer seems to miss the point that in the exegesis of the period there is ample evidence that Abraham was not praised for his faith and faithfulness in connection with specific deeds alone. In John's days he was already known as the first man who believed in the one true God and obeyed his words; cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.1.

crucial, and seems to be the undercurrent in John 8,31–59 as well. This does not mean, however, that Paul and John interpret the issue in the same way. On the contrary, the difference between Romans and John is fundamental. While in Romans 4 the picture of Abraham as the man justified by faith (cf. Gen 15,6) supports Paul's view that Abraham is the father of the Jews and of all who believe in Jesus, including Gentiles, John tends to narrow the scope: Abraham is the father of those who unreservedly believe in Jesus as the Son.

4.1.1.3. Part one, third argument: God as the father of οἱ πεπιστευκότες αὐτῷ Ἰουδαῖοι (*vv* 41b–48)

Although Abraham does not occur in this part of the dialogue, this discussion about the ancestry has an impact on the picture and function of Abraham in *vv* 31–47 as a whole. We have already pointed out the contrast between Abraham as the alleged father of the Jews and the devil as their real father. The step from Abraham to God as father of the Jews in *v* 41 has a similar effect. The transition in question has its precedent in Isa 63,16, where Israel prays to God their father to be with them, after Abraham and Jacob have turned away.[261] In John 8,41d however, the appeal to God has the character of a self-assured declaration, not a supplication. The denial of their illegitimate birth in *V* 41d – 'we were not born from fornication' – echoes the Old Testament prophetic terminology that identifies idolatry with fornication.[262] Convinced of being Abraham's true heirs, the opponents of Jesus declare that no one but God is their father, thereby showing their abhorrence of idolatry. From the Johannine perspective that belief in God cannot be isolated from belief in Jesus, the allusion to Isa 63,16 is far from convincing, even false: since the Jews speaking in

261 See chapter 3 section 3.1.1.

262 See chapter 2 section 2.1.1.3, n. 59.

our pericope cannot be children of Abraham, they cannot be real children of God.[263] If they do not believe in the Son, they cannot believe in God.[264]

4.1.2. Part two, John 8,48–58(59): who is Jesus?

In this part of the dialogue, Abraham occurs in two clusters of verses. In *vv*52–53 he is mentioned together with the prophets as a mortal human being, in *vv*56–58 as a visionary rejoicing in what he sees (*vv*56–58). In both clusters, the Jews name him 'our father' (*vv*53.56), a traditional and widely used designation. In our pericope, however, this designation has become problematic. The idea of Abraham's death (*vv*52–53) does not raise questions, especially not since it is firmly attested in the Genesis story (Gen 15,15; 25,7–10) and in later interpretations. According to some of these, after his death Abraham is taken into Paradise (4 Macc 13,17; Matt 8,11–12; Luke 13,28; 16,19–31; cf. Ignatius, *Philad.* 9,1). Abraham's being in Paradise does not seem to play a role in John 8,52–53. The same is obviously true of the traditional picture of Abraham as a prophet. Although Genesis 15 and 20 attribute prophetic features to Abraham, and some authors, Philo in particular, tend to aggrandize these features, there is no convincing argument that the picture of Abraham as a prophet plays a significant

263 The picture of Israel as son of God occurs for instance in Exod 4,22–23; Mal 2,10; cf. Jer 3,4; Hos 1,10. According to Lona (*Abraham*, 274–275), the shift from Abraham as father of the Jews to God as father of the Jews must be explained from the Jewish conviction that being children of Abraham includes being children of God. It does not refer to monotheism, since the idea that Abraham was the first monotheist does not find support in Jewish literature and in the Fourth Gospel. As to the latter point however, Dunn considers monotheism to be one of the four pillars of second Temple Judaism; see *The Partings of the Ways,* 235–237. Lona's view is not in line with authors like Philo and Josephus, who actually emphasize that Abraham was the first man who believed in the one true God.

264 See Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 2.284–285.

role in John 8,52–53. The fact that the prophets are mentioned in one breath with Abraham has probably more to do with their shared status as representatives of Israel's faith, than with the idea that Abraham should be reckoned among them.

The picture of Abraham as a visionary (John 8,56–58) is rather complicated. In *v* 58 Abraham appears as a great and illustrious person from the past ('before Abraham was I am'), in order to emphasize the supremacy of Jesus even more. The intricate formulation of *vv* 56–57 raises a number of questions. According to *v* 56, Abraham rejoiced at seeing the day of Jesus, actually saw this day and was glad to have seen it. The question is, firstly, if the vision and joy mentioned here relate to any episode in the stories about Abraham from the Old Testament itself or its ancient interpretations, and, secondly, whether these stories may help us understand what Abraham saw in the vision in John 8.[265] In Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, the mysterious vision of Abraham in Genesis 15 has given rise to a number of embellishing and sometimes spectacular interpretations. As has been noted in chapter 3, some of these commentaries – *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15–30, *Bib. Ant.* 23,6–7, 4 Ezra 3,14 and 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 4,4 – understand Abraham's vision as a vision of the future: either the history of his people, or the end of times, or both. Philo on the other hand, is more interested in defining the actual ***nature*** of Abraham's vision and in prophecy as a phenomenon (*Her.* 258.263–266) than in speculations about what Abraham saw.

A second episode that has inspired speculations about Abraham as a visionary is Genesis 18. Only after Abraham has seen off his three unknown guests, we are told that they are God and two men (18,

265 Since Maldonatus (16th century), the view had gained ground that John 8,56 describes a vision of Abraham after his death. Modern scholars tend to oppose this view; cf. Brown (*John*, 359–360), who refers to 12,41 where Isaiah is said to have seen the glory of Jesus, a vision that undoubtedly took place during the prophet's lifetime (see Isa 6,1). The depiction of Moses in John 5,45–46 supports Brown's argument.

16.18.22), and not until Gen 19,1 we learn that the two men are angels. As we have seen in the previous chapter of this study, the anthropomorphism of the story induced Philo to interpret it allegorically and understand the visitors as God, as his Being and Administering Powers (*Abr.* 119–125). The Targumim interpret Genesis 18 as the appearance to Abraham of the divine Presence, the Shekina (*Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Tg. Neof.* Gen 18,3).

In John 8,56, Abraham does not only have a vision, he also rejoices about it. The motif of Abraham's joy and rejoicing is not to be found in the Old Testament. It occurs in texts like *Jubilees* and in the Targumim, in most cases (*Jub.* 15,17 and *Tg. Onq. Gen* 17,17; Philo in *L.A.* 3.217–218) as euphemizing interpretations of his laughter in Gen 17,17. An alternative reading, identifying 'joy' with both the name 'Isaac' and the child himself, is to be found in Philo's *L.A.* 3.217–218. A second way of interpreting Abraham's joy occurs in Jubilees, where Abraham's joy is a relatively frequent phenomenon. Apart from the occasion described in Gen 17,17, Abraham rejoices at a number of other moments, especially during cultic events and at moments when God promises him an heir and a numerous offspring (*Jub.* 14,1–21). A third way of interpreting Abraham's joy, in the context of references to the end of times (*T. Levi* 18,14; *T. Benj.* 10,6), may be relevant for the present investigation, but also poses problems because it seems to stem from a later period.

In John 8,56 Abraham rejoices (ἠγαλλιάσατο) because he was to have a vision, he saw (καὶ εἶδεν) and was glad (καὶ ἐχάρη).[266] Exact parallels to this text should combine vision and a double reference to joy, preferably by two different verbs.

Although this combination does occur in some other writings, they do not always match John's description. In one of Philo's interpreta-

266 According to Lagrange (*Saint Jean*, 255) and Bernard (*St. John*, 321), John 8,56b expresses a wish or desire; Barrett (*St. John*, 351) on the other hand considers it to be the explanation of v 56c. According to Brown (*John*, 359) and Schnackenburg (*Johannesevangelium* 2.297), in *v* 56b Abraham rejoiced at seeing Jesus.

tions of Gen 17,17 (*QG* 3.55) for instance, 'laughter in joy', 'promise' and 'vision' are all mentioned, and Abraham laughs for joy because of God's promise and his hope of its fulfilment, and because of the vision he just had. But although in this text, 'vision' and 'promise' are both causes for joy, they are separately mentioned and do not relate to the same issue.[267]

Other parallels to John 8,56 are to be found in *Jubilees*. P. Grelot has pointed out *Jub.* 16,19 for three reasons: it has a double reference to Abraham's joy;[268] Abraham's joy is the result of the promise of the birth of Isaac, which opens a perspective of hope for an undefined future (*Jub.* 16,17–18);[269] promise and subsequent joy result into the institution of Sukkot, the feast which happens to form the scene of John 7–8. Although *Jub.* 16,19 is an interesting parallel to John because of its formulation and subject matter (joy in connection with a perspective for the future), there are also important differences: Jub. 16,19 is not about a vision; *Jubilees* uses two forms of the same root describing Abraham's joy, whereas John has two different verbs; in *Jubilees* both Abraham and Sarah are rejoicing. Since *Jubilees* depicts Abraham rejoicing over God's promise and his vision in a dream (14,1–20), other commentators[270] have pointed out *Jub.* 14,21 as a parallel to John 8,56. Jub. 14,21 is the hinge between the renderings of Genesis 15 and

267 According to Philo, Abraham's soul was filled with joy, because the three angels accepted his invitation to stay (*Abr.* 108). In *Abr.* 119–132 we find an exposition about the vision of God, but its tendency is so different from John 8,56, that it can hardly be regarded as a parallel.

268 See the translation by Grelot ('Jean 8,56', 625): 'Et nous allâmes notre chemin, et nous annonçames à Sara tout ce que nous avions dit (= à Abraham), et ils se réjouirent (*tafašehū*) tous les deux d'une très grande joie (*fāšā*).'

269 Cf. Grelot, 'Jean 8,56', 626.

270 See for instance Lagrange (*Saint Jean*, 254–255), Bultmann (*Johannesevangelium*, 247) and Schnackenburg (*Johannesevangelium* 2.298); see also their references to *Jub.* 15,17, where Abraham rejoices after the promise that Sarah will have a son from whom will come kings of nations (15,16). At the same time in *Jub.* 15,17 Abraham ponders if he and Sarah will have a child and asks God concerning Ishmael.

Genesis 16: 'and Abram rejoiced and told all of these things to Sarai, his wife,' whereby 'all of these things' stands for the vision and dream of Jub. 14,1–20 (= Genesis 15). *Jub.* 14,21 is not completely parallel to John 8,56 either: Abraham's joy is only mentioned once, the events that have caused Abraham's joy are referred to in very general terms. However, *Jub.* 14,21 and 16,19 should not be immediately dismissed as possible backgrounds of John 8,56. Abraham's joy in *Jub.* 14,21 and 16,19 about the promise of descendants, designated as 'seed' and 'son' respectively, may have inspired John to depict Abraham's rejoicing in seeing the day of Jesus, the promised Son. In *Jub.* 14,21, Abraham's joy does not only concern the promise of his having offspring, but also of their coming out of slavery (14,14–15), a motif discussed in John 8,31–37. On the other hand, the texts from *Jubilees* do not explain why Abraham looked forward to seeing the day of Jesus, and not to seeing Jesus himself. But this difference does not appear essential, considering the Johannine concept of present eschatology, which takes together the coming of Jesus, his presence on earth and his resurrection into one theological motif.[271]

*V*57 is puzzling for the reversal of the subject of *v*56 into the object and vice versa.[272] The reversal – a classical example of Johannine misunderstanding – produces the obviously absurd question how Jesus, living now, could have seen Abraham, who lived two thousand years earlier. The other peculiar feature is the reference to Jesus' age as being

271 See the – slightly harmonizing – translation of John 8,56 in the NBV: 'Abraham, uw vader, verheugde zich op mijn komst, en toen hij die meemaakte was hij blij.' (Literally: 'Abraham, your father, looked forward to my coming, and when he experienced it he was glad.')

272 This puzzling feature has obviously struck early readers of John as well: see the minority reading εωρακεν σε (P75 ℵ 070 sys sa ac2 pbo). For the suggestion that the minority reading is the original one, see Urban and M. Patrick, '"Before Abraham Was I Am" pp.159–160, and Tj. Baarda, 'John 8:57b, The Contribution of the Daitessaron of Tatian', *NovT* 38 [1996] 336–343). In general, however, commentators tend to prefer the majority reading with its *lectio difficilior* ἑώρακας.

less than *fifty* years. As to the latter issue, Bultmann and Hoskyns have argued that 'fifty years' stands for a lifetime (Num 4,3.47; 8,25).[273] More recently, É. Delebecque[274] has argued that the verb ἔχειν cannot be used to speak of somebody's age and that therefore the remark should be understood as: 'You have seen Abraham less than fifty years ago?' In French: 'Il n'y a pas encore cinquante ans que tu as vu Abraham?', or 'Tu as vu Abraham depuis moins de cinquante ans.' According to Delebecque, this translation is to be preferred because the Johannine use of the construction ἔχειν plus an indication of time designates a condition or situation which has not ended yet. The Jews probably mention the number of fifty because it is a round figure, like the two thousand years that have passed since the age of Abraham. M. J. Edwards[275] on the other hand interprets the fifty years in John 8,57 as a 'jubilee' and refers to *Jub.* 23,10–11.15, a text about the decline of man's life time since the generations before the Flood. Even Abraham, who was 'perfect in all of his actions with the Lord', did not complete four jubilees, and presently people do not live longer than seventy years – or eighty, if they are strong. This would mean that in John 8,57 the Jews are suggesting that Abraham, who lived almost four jubilees, is greater than Jesus, who has lived not even one.

As to the question how Jesus could have seen Abraham, it is very likely that the author intended the absurdity, in order to prepare the proclamation of the pre-existence of Jesus in *v*58. However, this does not mean that the idea that led to this remark cannot be found in literature of the period. Texts like Luke 16,22–23 and 4 Macc 13,17

273 Cf. also Philo, *Opif.* 105.

274 Delebeque, 'Jésus contemporain d'Abraham selon Jean 8,57', *RB* 93 [1986] 85–92.

275 Edwards '"Not Yet Fifty Years Old": John 8,57', *NTS* 40 [1994], 449–454, here pp 449–441. Apart from the argument mentioned here, Edward's suggestion is also interesting because he points out that Jubilees stems from the Hassidic circles in which also the Pharisaic movement originates. As to his suggestion that the adversaries of Jesus/John in 8,57 are from circles advocating the solar calendar of Jubilees, one may ask if this is not more true of John himself.

voice the idea that the dead in their afterlife may see Abraham in Paradise, and they may very well give voice to general contemporary Jewish ideas about Abraham in Paradise. When read from this perspective, the question in John 8,57 may be how Jesus could have seen Abraham in Paradise, while he is still alive, a mortal human being who had not tasted death yet. The problem with this reading is that it refers to the future, while *v*58 is about the remote past: 'before Abraham was I am'. Therefore it is preferable to follow Bultmann's sober reading and regard the 'fifty years' in John 8,57 as a designation of man's lifetime. The amazement of the Jews in John 8,57 remains the same: how could Jesus, who is a mortal human being and has not even fulfilled what may be expected to be his lifetime, have met Abraham, who lived many centuries ago? This interpretation of Jesus seeing Abraham in a vision in the past, and the interpretation of Abraham as a person who has been living in the past and is not alive now, makes John 8,56–58 into a coherent reasoning, especially if we take the discussion in *v*52–53 into account. Delebecque's interpretation enhances the mockery of *v*57, but clashes with *v*58: 'You have not even seen Abraham less than fifty years ago? (...) I say: *before* Abraham became, I am.' The question whether we should take 'fifty years' as the duration of human life in terms of a jubilee does not seem to be of primary importance.[276] The step from the mockery in *v*57 to the self-proclamation of Jesus in *v*58 is the quintessential part of our pericope.[277] This final ἐγώ εἰμι saying of John 8 (cf. 8,24.28)

276 The interesting point in Edwards' reading is the link with *Jubilees* 21, which reinforces suggestions that John and Jubilees stand on common ground; cf. the possible link between John 8,56 and *Jub.* 14,21 and 16,19. For the connection with *Jubilees*, especially *Jub.* 16,20-31, see also A.C. Brunson, *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John. An Intertextual Study on the New Exodus Pattern in the Theology of John* (WUNT 2.Reihe, Bd. 158; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 290–301.

277 The reaction of the bystanders in John 8,59 contradicts Motyer's suggestion (*Your Father*, 208–209) that in *vv* 56–58 Jesus is to be compared with a divine agent of God invested with the name of God like IAOEL in *Apoc. Abr.* 10,3 and 17,13

affirms Jesus' existence before all, and consequently his priority over Abraham.[278]

4.2. Summary

In the next sections, we shall summarize the results of our investigation into the role of Abraham in the Fourth Gospel and the origins of the Johannine picture of Abraham.

278 Urban and Patrick ("'Before Abraham'") argue that John 8,56–58 may be explained from the Philonic reasoning that Abraham knew that the Logos was present when the birth of Isaac was announced (Genesis 18; 'Before Abraham', 184). As we have pointed out before, we do not find references to the Logos in the passage of *De Abrahamo* on Genesis 18 itself. Urban and Patrick refer to other works by Philo (e.g. *Mut.* 7.11.15.16.17.18.27–28; 29.167–168; *Vita Mos.* 1.66; *De Somn.* 1.228–230; *Cher.* 27–28; *De Fuga* 100–101) and from these they conclude that in *De Abrahamo* the Logos is present as well. Moreover, they explain 'my day' (John 8,56) as a reference to 'light' and argue that Philo frequently uses the symbol of light, also with regard to the Logos (in *De Somn.* 1.75; "'Before Abraham'", 185). These assumptions seem rather far-fetched. Apart from being very complicated and circumstantial, the evidence hardly recurs in John's own theology. The second problem is that 'my day' in *v* 56 in John has an eschatological function and cannot be interpreted as 'my light' as easily as the authors of the article suggest ("Before Abraham", 185). Hanson (*The Prophetic Gospel*, 125–131) also argues that in 8,56–58 John refers to Abraham's vision of the pre-existent logos, an idea which had been prepared by the extensive ***haggada*** about Genesis 18–19 (cf. Philo *Abr.* 113; *QG* 4.2; *Tg. Onq. Gen* 18,5). His treatment of these traditions is not always as careful as required. For instance, he identifies 'God', 'Shekina' (*Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 18, 4-5; *Tg. Neof.* Gen 18,3.13) and 'Logos', and concludes: 'This means that John identified one of the three men who visited Abraham as described in Genesis 18 with the pre-existent Word. Abraham prostrates himself before them and calls one of them 'Lord'. That was no doubt the pre-existent Logos in John's view.' Apart from the easy identification of Philo's interpretation with those of the Targumim and John, the analysis of the Fourth Gospel is somewhat hasty. John does identify Jesus with the pre-existent Logos, but he does so in the prologue and not – at least not explicitly – in the body of the Gospel, where Jesus is called 'Son of Man', 'Bread of Life', 'Truth' etc. (cf. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [Cambridge: University Press, 1954], 265–267; Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 4.259).

4.2.1. The picture of Abraham in John 8,31–59

With regard to the question whether the role and picture of Abraham in early Jewish sources in general illuminate Abraham's role John, we would like to point out the following:

a) The Johannine picture of Abraham relies on texts from the Old Testament, especially the Abraham cycle in Genesis, and/or the interpretations of these texts as they are to be found in early Jewish and early Christian literature.

b) The passage John 8,31–47 is essentially about the question of Abraham's relation to the Jews as their ancestor. In this context, John distinguishes between σπέρμα Ἀβράαμ and τέκνα τοῦ Ἀβράαμ. These designations in themselves are traditional, but the way John uses the first one in order to designate physical descent, and the second one to designate spiritual descent from Abraham, does not appear to have a real precedent.

c) In the present context, the evangelist has turned traditional Jewish appeals to Abraham and God as their father, both of which are quintessential expressions of the faith of Jesus' opponents in our pericope, into arguments against their convictions, and in favour of their exclusion.

d) In John 8,48–59 the emphasis lies on Abraham in relation to Jesus. The picture sketched here is more fragmentary than in 8,31–47, and the parallels found in early Jewish sources do not entirely cover John's picture. This is particularly true of *vv*56–58, where the picture of Abraham as a seer of the future is combined with the issue of his joy about this vision. The idea of Abraham's joy is not very prominent in ancient Jewish literature, but it does occur comparatively frequently in *Jubilees*.

e) As in the first part of this pericope, Abraham appears as a witness against Jesus' interlocutors and advocate of John's christology. These characteristics account for the particularities of the Abraham picture in *vv*56–58.

4.2.2. *The origins of John's picture of Abraham*

The Johannine picture of Abraham is based on ideas about Abraham that were current in John's days. This is particularly true of two images: Abraham as the ancestor of the Jews and Abraham as the exemplary man of faith. John was probably acquainted with traditions of Abraham as the first monotheist for which we find ample evidence in Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish sources. For other themes in relation to Abraham, such as the question of freedom and slavery, Abraham's works, his death and his vision, literature of the period also provides us with examples, although for some elements these examples vary greatly, or are scarce in number.

As to the individual issues in relation to Abraham, we may conclude the following:

a) It is obvious that for the idea of Abraham as father of the Jews John could rely on ample traditions. The Johannine distinction between 'seed of Abraham' and 'children of Abraham' does not appear to have a real precedent. We have pointed out the use of terms like 'son' and 'daughter' of Abraham in 4 Maccabees and Luke[279] in relation to faithfulness to the Law, and the Lukan use of 'son' and 'daughter' for people who are excluded or isolated (Luke 13,16 an 19,9). John on the other hand uses the term 'children of Abraham' as a term of inclusion for those who believe in Jesus, implying the exclusion of those who do not believe in him. There is, however, no evidence that John is actually based on Luke or 4 Maccabees.

b) The association of Abraham and freedom in John 8,33 is not original either. Philo and Josephus depict Abraham as a noble and free man, in both sociological and spiritual sense. We found that the idea of spiritual freedom occurs in rabbinic literature, for instance in the famous words ascribed to Rabbi Aqiba in *Mishna*

279 4 Macc 9,21; 15,28; Luke 19,9; 13,16; cf. 4 Macc 6,17–22, 'children of Abraham'.

Baba Qamma (8,6). When we look into the subject of freedom in the political sense, there are parallels with the account by Flavius Josephus about Eleazar and his followers (*J.W.* 7.323), who pride themselves in their freedom. We find a similar tendency among the 'believing Jews' in John 8,33, who, by alluding to an Old Testament passage (Gen 15, 13–14) which literally says the opposite, undermine their own credibility.

c) There is a fair amount of literary evidence that Abraham was regarded as a man who excelled in doing a number of good works and works of faith, such as offering hospitality to strangers en observing the commandments of the Torah. However, literary parallels for what John calls 'the works' of Abraham are rare; see *Jub.* 23,10 and 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 57,2.

d) Although Abraham's death (John 8,52–53) was considered an undisputed fact (cf. Gen 15,15 and 25,8), we know that in John's days there were speculations about Abraham's life after death (see 4 Mac 13,17 and Luke 16,19–31). Such speculations do not seem to play a role in John 8,57. The paradox in John 8,57 lies in the fact that Abraham died centuries ago and Jesus lives now. The fact that Abraham and the prophets are mentioned together (*vv* 52–53) has no obvious precedents, but they occur separately in lists of Israel's illustrious ancestors (Sir 44–50; Heb 11).

e) Like John 8,56, a number of other early Jewish works (*Apocalypse of Abraham*; Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*; cf. Genesis 15) attest that Abraham had a vision of future events. Abraham's joy, the prominent theme of John 8,56, occurs infrequently and in very different contexts, in Philo, *Jubilees* and the Targumim. The combination of vision and joy is rare. The most interesting parallels to John are *Jub.* 14,21 and 16,19. However, the affinity between John and these texts from *Jubilees* does not provide us with sufficient data in order to draw further conclusions about the relation between John and *Jubilees* in general; here lies an interesting field of research.

The conclusion seems justified that John used well known and sometimes even widespread ideas about Abraham. If it comes to details, we find parallels to John's picture of Abraham in different sources, but with regard to particular issues, we find an affinity with a very limited number of writings, among which *Jubilees* provides some interesting details.

4.3. Conclusions

At first sight, the Johannine picture of Abraham seems fragmentary,[280] an amalgam of disparate elements stemming from or inspired by a variety of sources. At the same time, this picture has a certain coherence and consistency because of its specific literary style and christology. Still, if we take into account the very limited role of Abraham in the Fourth Gospel – he only occurs in our pericope – the question arises why in John we find a depiction of Israel's ancestor at all. The answer lies in the question itself: Abraham has a place in John because he is the ancestor of Israel, the ancestor of the Jews. Abraham, like Moses,[281] is a focal point in the history of the covenant, the relation between God and his people. With Abraham the history of Israel begins. Therefore, Abraham has always been a focal point of Jewish self-definition

280 Cf. Wieser's remark (*Abrahamvorstellungen*, 131): 'Die Bezugnahmen auf Abraham sind fast zufällig in die Rede Jesu eingestreut, sodass zunächst der Eindruck entsteht, als erheischten disparate Aspekte der Abrahamtradition nur flüchtig Aufmerksamkeit, um danach an die Peripherie der kreisenden Gedankengang zu driften. Von einem zusammenhängenden Midrash kann kaum die Rede sein.'

281 For John's treatment of Moses see 1,17; 6,32; and especially 5,45.47. An extensive picture of Moses in the Fourth Gospel is to be found in T.F. Glasson, Moses in the Fourth Gospel (*Studies in Biblical Theology*; London: SCM, 1963); cf. more recently M.-É. Boismard, Moïse ou Jésus. *Essai de christologie johannique* (BETL 84; Leuven: Leuven University Press – Peeters, 1988; reprinted as: *Moses or Jesus. An Essay in Johannine Christology* (Minneapolis/Leuven: Fortress/Leuven University Press-Peeters, 1993).

and the definition of the relationship between Israel and God.[282] Consequently, when seeking to define who Jesus was and who his interlocutors were, the evangelist could not ignore Abraham; omitting Abraham meant omitting something essential about his own beliefs.

As to the *origin* of the Johannine picture of Abraham, for most of its elements parallels are to be found in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament and early Jewish literature. For his depiction of Abraham, John could draw on a long, vast, and very diverse exegetical stream of traditions. The fact that out of this vast stream of traditions the evangelist obviously drew on some currents may indicate that he was only acquainted with a limited range of exegetical outlooks, but it may also indicate that he preferred particular perspectives. Like most scholars in the field, we are reluctant to say that John used specific sources, and prefer to speak of currents in exegesis and tendencies that John has in common with others, notably *Jubilees*, 4 Maccabees and Luke, Philo and Josephus. From the similarity in concept and language between John and *Jubilees* does not automatically follow that John was acquainted with *Jubilees* itself. The Johannine interpretation may have been inspired by or even derived from *Jubilees*, but there is also the possibility that John and *Jubilees* both rely on a tradition of which we have no other examples. Grelot's suggestion that John and *Jubilees* are exponents of the same tradition[283] of interpretation may explain the similarities between John 8,56 and *Jub.* 14,21 and 16,19.

What we have said about John's possible dependence on exegetical

282 Culpepper ('Anti-Judaism', p. 81) points out that one of the three principal covenants between God and the Jewish people was the Abrahamic covenant of sonship.

283 As to the parallel with Philo: we have seen that 'vision' and 'joy' also occur in several of Philo's tractates, but that Philo's treatment of them bears very little resemblance to John's. D.T. Runia (*Philo in Early Christian Literature. A Survey* [CRINT 3/3; Assen/Minneapolis: van Gorcum/Fortress Press, 1993], 78–83, p. 81) remarks that Philo and John may have some common background, but that it cannot be proven that John knew and used Philo's writings.

traditions appears *mutatis mutandis* to be true of his use of the Abraham cycle in Genesis as well. Genesis 15, 18 and 21 seem to be particularly relevant: Genesis 21 with regard to *v* 35, Genesis 18 with regard to *vv* 39–41ª.56 and Genesis 15 throughout the pericope. John 8,33 alludes to Gen 15,13–14, where 'seed of Abraham' occurs in the context of slavery. The depiction of the household with the slave and the son (John 8,35) in the context of descent from Abraham (8,33.37), may also have been inspired by the opposition between Abraham's promised son and heir and the Damascene slave Eliezer in Gen 15,2–4. A third element in John's depiction, the death of Abraham, is explicitly mentioned in Gen 15,15. As to Abraham's faith (cf. John 8,38–41), we have seen that this finds support in Gen 15,6 and interpretations of it, sometimes in combination with Gen 22. The combination of vision and joy (*v* 56), may go back to the interpretation of Genesis 15 in Jub. 14,21, where Abraham looks back to the vision he just had, the vision described in Genesis 15.

More than other passages in Genesis, Genesis 15 appears to be the key passage for an adequate understanding of John's view on Abraham. Within the Abraham cycle itself Genesis 15 is a quintessential passage when it comes to the connection between Abraham's own ways and the future of his descendants. By repeating God's promises to Abraham about a son and the land, and by commemorating Abraham's origin as a stranger from Ur of the Chaldaeans, Genesis 15 connects the past with the future and the life of the patriarch with the history of the people of Israel and its institutions. Abraham's sacrifice foreshadows practices in the Temple, and his vision contains the announcement of Israel's slavery in Egypt and the Exodus. The association of Abraham's deeds and belief with the history of his offspring and vice versa, provides Israel's history, the Exodus in particular, with a basis and a legitimization. This may be the reason why John seems to concentrate on traditional explanations of Genesis 15.

John's treatment of Gen 15,13–14 may be illustrative for the way existing traditions appear in the Fourth Gospel. There may have been two reasons for the allusion to these verses. In the first place, Genesis

15,13–14 fits into John's polemic against his opponents, especially with regard to their presumptions about their freedom. The motif of slavery in Gen 15,13–14 literally contradicts their claim to freedom as descendants from Abraham. In the second place, the motifs of Abraham's vision of the future in Genesis 15,13–14 (and of Abraham's death, Gen 15,15) lend themselves for a christological reinterpretation, as arguments in favour of the greatness and even pre-existence of Jesus.

5

THE PLACE OF JOHN 8,31–59 IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY AND ITS JEWISH ENVIRONMENT

The major question of this study is how the polemic of John 8,31–59 should be situated within the conflict between early Christianity and Judaism. The Fourth Gospel has a complicated relationship with Judaism, combining familiarity with Jewish theological ideas and exegetical methods with an anti-Jewish attitude, particularly in the discussions between Jesus and the Jews in John 1–12, and in the passion narrative in John 18–19.[284] In the present chapter of this study, we will deal with theological and historical aspects of the controversy between the Johannine group and its Jewish environment, and with the place of our pericope within this conflict. Before discussing these questions, we would like to make some preliminary remarks about the assumptions regarding the intended audience of the Fourth Gospel and its opponents that underlie the title of this chapter.

Nowadays most New Testament scholars agree that the Fourth Gospel in one way or another reflects a real historical conflict between a group of Christians and a group of Jews,[285] and that its intended audience and actual recipients were Christians. Arguments for the latter assumption

284 In this chapter we shall speak about the Jews (without quotation marks) when all or various Jewish groups are meant, sometimes including groups that John designates as 'the Jews'. 'The Jews' (with quotation marks) will be used whenever John himself uses this name in the text, in references or allusions to John's texts or in cases when it is clear that e.g. the Pharisees should be identified with 'the Jews'.

285 A dissident voice in this almost unisonous choir is B. W. J. de Ruyter (*De gemeente van de evangelist Johannes: haar polemiek en haar geschiedenis* [Delft: Eburon, 1998]), who argues that throughout the Fourth Gospel John's opponents are other Christians, not Jews.

are: a) the author presupposes his audience to be acquainted with certain facts which are not explained in the Fourth Gospel itself;[286] b) the issue of 'remaining' in Jesus can only be meant for believers;[287] c) only insiders could have understood the irony and arguments of the misunderstandings which are so prominent in John.[288]

As to the question of the identity of the opponents, 'the Jews', consensus is less general. John's depiction of them is ambiguous, sometimes contradictory and, above all, coloured by his own theological position. Their identification with leading Pharisaic circles has turned out to be problematic, especially for historical reasons. This study does not offer a complete survey of the state of present day research on the *John* and the *Jews*; for that, we refer to the examination by U.C. von Wahlde and others.[289] In the following sections, we shall only describe a limited number of interpretations, selected because they are representative for modern and recent Johannine scholarship on the subject.

In this chapter, we shall proceed as follows. In section 1, we will

286 For instance, the fact that John is mentioned without the designation 'the Baptist' (1,6.15.19.26.32.35.41) indicates that tbe evangelist's audience must have known who he was; 4,44 assumes that they were acquainted with the story of the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth (cf. Math 13,53–58; Mark 6,1–6; Luke 4,16–30); the brothers of Jesus are mentioned without any introduction (7,3.5.10); like Matthew 2 and Luke 2, John 7,42 reflects an early discussion about the birth place of Jesus.

287 Cf. Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde*, 52.

288 Cf. F. Vouga, *Le cadre historique et l' intention théologique de Jean* (Paris, 1977) 34–36.

289 See for a survey of research about John's audience von Wahlde, "'The Jews' in the Gospel of John: Fifteen Years of Research (1983–1998)," *ETL* 76 (2000) 30–55; for older surveys see R. Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) 147–156 and Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 222–223; cf. also the bibliographic notes in M.C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 67–70.

observe how and where John mentions the Jews; in section 2, we will give a short survey of the way John's picture of the Jews has been interpreted by New Testament scholars during the last few decades. Section 3 turns to John's description of the Jews in our pericope and to its interpretation by Martyn; section 4 will describe John's strategy in convincing his readers to remain faithful adherents of Jesus, and the role of Abraham within this strategy. Conclusions will follow in section 5.

5.1. The Jews in the Fourth Gospel — some observations[290]

The Jews occur in John 1–12 and John 18–20. Apart from the flashback to 7,34 in John 13,33, the Jews are absent from the farewell discourses (13–17). The reference in the Prologue to the rejection of Jesus by his own people (1,11) sets the tone for the entire Fourth Gospel. This rejection takes shape in a number of increasingly vehement disputes (2,18–12,36) and ends up with an explanation why the Jews are incapable of believing Jesus (12,37–42). The fact that they are absent from the farewell discourses is probably due to the inner-Christian character of these monologues, and does not mean that they do not play a role at all. In John 13–17 the threat and the opposition come from 'the world' (15,18; 16,33), but 16,2 suggests at least a partial identification of 'the world' and 'the Jews'. After the interruption of John 13–17, the Jews reappear in the passion narrative,[291] again in direct confrontation with Jesus.[292]

An examination of all places where John mentions Jewish groups

290 For literature on this point see for instance R.H. Fuller, 'The 'Jews' in the Fourth Gospel', *Dialog* 16 (1977) 31–37; U.C. von Wahlde, 'The Johannine Jews: A Critical Survey,' *NTS* 28 (1982) 33–60; J. Ashton, 'The Identity and Function of the IOUDAIOI in the Fourth Gospel,' *NovT* 27 (1985) 40–75; M. de Jonge, 'The Conflict Between Jesus and the Jews and the Radical Christology of the Fourth Gospel', *PerspRelStud* 20 (1993) 341–355; P. Grelot, *Les Juifs dans l'Évangile selon Jean. Enquête historique et réflexion théologique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1995).

or Jewish characters other than Jesus and his disciples results in the following picture:

a. Although to a lesser degree than in the Synoptics, one finds in the Fourth Gospel a variety of distinct Jewish groups: two major groups, the Pharisees and 'the crowd' or 'crowds', and some minor groups, i.e. the Levites, the priests, chief priests and officers.

b. A group of characters is named 'the Jews'. 'The Jews' are not a clearly distinguishable group like e.g. the Pharisees. Although the term is flexible,[293] it very often stands for people with influence and power. 'The Jews' send priests and Levites on their behalf (1,19), they are in a position to question the lame man healed by Jesus (5,10–12), and are feared by others (7,13; 9,22; 19,38; 20,19). They persecute Jesus (5,16) for his violation of the Sabbath and his blasphemy and even try to kill him (5,18; 8,37.40.59; 10,31; 11,8), and decisively influence the events of the passion narrative (cf. 19,7.12.14–15).

c. In a number of instances 'the Jews' are to be identified with other groups; in most cases with the Pharisees (1,19–24; 8,13.22; 9,13.22.23.40; also 18,3.12),[294] occasionally with the common people, 'the crowd' (6,41.52; 12,9.11;[295] probably also 11,19.31.33.36.45–52). In a number of cases (8,13.22; 9,13.16.18) the designation 'the Pharisees' gives way to the designation 'the Jews', without an obvious change of characters. In chap. 9 we find a double shift, from 'the Pharisees' (*vv* 13.16) to 'the Jews' (*v* 18) and back again

291 About the role of the Jews in the Passion Narrative see R. Leistner, *Antijudaismus im Johannesevangelium? Darstellung des Problems in der neueren Auslegungsgeschichte und Untersuchung der Leidensgeschichte* (Theologie und Wirklichkeit Bd. 3; Bern/Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1974) 104–150.

292 See also the survey by Grelot (*Les Juifs*, 27–46).

293 Cf. G. Caron, 'Exploring a religious dimension: The Johannine Jews', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 24 (1995) 159–171, p. 164.

294 Compare the role of the Pharisees in John 9 with the role of 'the Jews' in John 5.

295 Other places where 'the Jews' are not pictured as leaders are 18,20 and 19,20.21; 11,54 is uncertain.

to 'the Pharisees' (*v*40). The same applies to 12,9.11.12, where 'the great crowd of the Jews' turns into 'the Jews' and back again into 'the crowd' (cf. 12,17.18). In 6,24.41.52 'the crowd' becomes 'the Jews'.

d. Throughout John the Pharisees appear as authorities (3,1; 4,1; 7,32.45.48; 9,13.15; 18,3).[296] Their occasional contempt for 'the crowd' is based upon their superior knowledge of the Law (7,49). They sometimes act as the power behind other groups, such as the priests and Levites (1,19–24), and the officers (7,32.45–47; cf. 18,3), while at some instances they side with them (cf. 7,48 with regard to the rulers). Apart from 18,3, they are absent from the passion narrative. There 'the Jews' are the opponents of Jesus, together with the chief priests (18,35; 19,6.15.21) and the officers (18,12.22; 19,6). Although the Pharisees are predominantly hostile towards Jesus, some among them question their own presumptions (9,16) or even sympathize with him (so Nicodemus, 3,1; 7,50).[297]

e. The 'crowd' are often people in search for Jesus and eager to hear him (5,13?; 6,2.5.22.24.25; 7,31.40; 11,42; 12,12.17.18). Their reactions to his words and deeds vary: some of them believe in him (7,31.40; 12,9–11.17.18), others either doubt (7,12.20.40–43) or misunderstand him (6,30–31; 12,34), or are openly hostile (7,20.44).[298] In 12,29 they disagree about the voice of heaven that they have heard speaking. 'The crowd' refer to the Law when discussing with Jesus the issue of the Son of man (12,34), despite the fact that the Pharisees consider them ignorant in matters of the Law (7,49).

296 The Pharisees are mentioned in 1,24; 3,1; 4,1; 7,32.45.47.48; 8,13; 9,13.15.16.40; 11,46.47.57; 12,19.42; 18,3.

297 The same applies mutatis mutandis for the leaders (7,26; 12,42) and the officers (7,46).

298 According to Culpepper (*Anatomy*, 132) 'the crowd represents the struggle of those who are open to believing, but neither the scriptures nor the signs lead them to authentic faith.'

f. In a number of instances, 'the Jews' designate the Jewish people in general. This is primarily the case in references to Jewish festivals and customs (cf. e.g. 2,6; 2,13; 5,1; 7,2; 11,55; 19,40.42). Usually, conflicts between Jesus and 'the Jews' (and related groups) arise when the Jews celebrate their history of salvation.[299] Pilate – a non-Jew – gives Jesus the title 'king of the Jews', 'Jews' being a reference to the Jewish people as a national and religious entity. Other examples of this use of the term are to be found in chap. 4, where the Samaritan woman, another non-Jew, calls Jesus 'a Jew' (4,9) and Jesus says that salvation is 'from the Jews' (4,22).

With regard to the ***subject matter*** of the discussions between Jesus and 'the Jews' or particular groups, it should be noted that the role of halakic issues is limited, especially in comparison with the synoptic Gospels. The discussion in John 5 between Jesus and 'the Jews' is about healing on Sabbath, which is also the reason for the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees/'the Jews' in John 9. In 7,22–23 Jesus mentions circumcision on the Sabbath[300] as an argument against 'the Jews' (7,15) and 'the crowd' (7,20). Allusions to purification occur in apparently informative secondary remarks: in 2,6 ritual purification is said to be important to 'the Jews', in 18,28 to the High Priest, the Pharisees, officers and chief priests, and to the men who are responsible for Jesus' death.[301] 'The Jews' ask Pilate to take away the crucified bodies early because of the day of Preparation of the Jews (19,31).[302]

An important difference between John and the Synoptics is that John does not discuss halakic issues for their own sake, but primarily

299 Caron ('Exploring,' 166) remarks: 'It is as if the Jesus of this Gospel always finds the 'Johannine Jews' en fête, celebrating their history, their past, and their identity—an identity which no one can ever question!'

300 See for a more detailed treatment of this issue, Tomson, '*Hemel*', 281–86.

301 In 3,25 purification is subject of discussion between the disciples of John the Baptist and 'a Jew'.

302 Other references to the Law in the halakic sense occur in the context of the trial of Jesus (18,31; 19,7).

as a means of preparing or illustrating his own christological arguments. In John 5 for instance, after having healed a lame man at the pool of Bethzatha (5,2–9) and having been persecuted by 'the Jews' (5,16) because the healing took place on a Sabbath, Jesus points out that he is working on the Sabbath because his Father is working on the Sabbath as well. This argument provokes in the Jews an even stronger wish to kill him, not so much because he has violated the Sabbath, but primarily because he has made himself equal to God. He has made himself guilty of blasphemy and therefore deserves the death penalty (5,18; see also 8,58–59; 10,30–31; cf. 7,47, where Jesus is accused of leading the people astray). In John 7, we find another example of the entwinement of the Law as the source of ***halaka*** and its character as a witness for or against Jesus. Jesus is teaching in the Temple, when 'the Jews' start asking how it is that he has such knowledge [of the Law] without having studied it. He replies that his authority comes from God (7,14–18), and reproaches them for not keeping the Law given by Moses: if they had kept Moses' word, they certainly would not seek to kill him (7,19). Why are they angry with him? If it is allowed to circumcise on the Sabbath—an act concerning only part of the body—why should he not be allowed to heal the whole body (7,22–23; cf. the discussion in John 5)? From John 5 and 7 it seems obvious that discussions about the Law and halakic issues are principally meant to support the authority of Jesus and proclaim that he is the Son.

Sometimes halakic arguments are used in order to defend the position of Jesus. This is the case with his self-defence in John 8,17, where Jesus refers to the halakic principle that a legal charge is only valid if there are two witnesses or more (Deut 19,15). In 7,51 Nicodemus defends Jesus with the halakic argument that, according to the Law, a suspect has the right to be heard in court. Nicodemus' co-Pharisees on the other hand obviously regard the Law as a witness ***against*** Jesus, and therefore curse the crowd that sympathizes with Jesus for their ignorance. The fact that Nicodemus speaks of 'our Law' illustrates the tendency in the

Fourth Gospel to regard the Law as something belonging to a particular group, even something alien; the alienating marks are usually put on the lips of Jesus ('your Law': 8,17; 10,34; 'their Law': 15,25).[303] The Law was given through Moses, and 'grace and truth came through Christ' (1,17). In other words, John takes the Law seriously as a witness to Jesus (John 1,45; 8,17; 10,34; 15,25),[304] and makes Jesus use halakic arguments in order to meet with the arguments of his interlocutors (12,34; cf. 8,13). From the Johannine perspective however, halaka is the servant of christology.

In sum, we conclude that the Johannine picture of the Jews is predominantly negative. People referred to as 'the Jews' are hostile to Jesus, especially but not exclusively in instances where they can be identified as Pharisees (see for instance chap. 5). Although there are some exceptions – see the references to believing Jews in 8,30.31; 11,45; 12,11; see also 2,23 – they are characterized by unbelief and misunderstanding. The Jews keep to their religious convictions and

303 Some scholars regard this as a proof of the separation of the Johannine community from Judaism; so Culpepper, 'Anti-Judaism,' 70: 'Nowhere in the [Qumran] scrolls do we find the authors writing about 'the Jews' as a people apart from themselves referring to the Torah as 'your law' (John 8,17). John marks the decisive separation of Christians from Jews, at least in one locality.'

304 In this sense, 'the Law' is synonymous with 'the Scriptures' (cf. 10,34–35; 7,42.49). Like the Law, the Scriptures occur as a witness against Jesus (7,42; 8,13), and from the Johannine perspective as a witness against the Jews (7,19.23; 8,17; 10,34; cf. 5,46-47) and for Jesus (5,39). The disciples refer to the Law (1,45) and the Scripture/Scriptures (2,22) in order to explain who Jesus is. See for the function of the Law in John: S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John* (*NovTSup* 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975); Boismard, *Moses*; Tomson, '*Hemel*', 286-288. See for the function of Scripture in John: J. Beutler, 'The Use of 'Scripture' in the Gospel of John', in *Exploring the Gospel of John. In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 147–162; M.J.J. Menken, 'Observations on the Significance of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel,' *Neot* 33 (1999) 1, 125–143.

institutions, and regard Jesus' claim that he is the Son as blasphemous. The Pharisees are the most hostile faction among them, with the positive exception of Nicodemus, who sympathizes with Jesus but whose sympathy never leads to a wholehearted acknowledgement of him (3,2; cf. 7,50; 19,39). The only group of Jews tending to be more sympathetic is 'the crowd', but even their sympathy is not convincing and easily turns into hostility (cf. 7,20.44). Because of their refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Son, in the end all groups among the Jews are to be reckoned unbelievers, despite the advantage of their history (4,22: 'salvation is from the Jews').[305] In 15,18–27, and 15,25 especially, John suggests a partial if not complete identification of 'the world' and 'the Jews'.[306] All factions among the Jews are marked as relying on the Law. However, we may ask whether John's christological treatment of halakic issues really allows us to characterize the Jews of the Fourth Gospel more than superficially, let alone with their own terms or arguments.

305 Culpepper (*Anatomy*, 129) concludes that the 'pathos of their [the Jews'] unbelief is that they are the religious people, some even the religious authorities, who have had all the advantages of the heritage of Israel.'

306 Grelot, *Les Juifs*, 195.

5.2. οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι *in John : identity, function and history*

During the last few decades, scholars have become increasingly sensible to John's remarkable use of the term 'the Jews' for a certain group of people and his negative picture of these people. This sensibility shows from to the large number of studies about anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel in general, and the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in particular. We will briefly sketch the most representative positions in New Testament scholarship today,[307] with the help of the categories described by J. Ashton in his 1985 article:[308] the reference of the term, its sense or function, and its historical background.

5.2.1. *The identity and the sense of* οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι

As to the identity of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, interpretations vary from a limited group of leaders from Pharisaic circles up to the entire Jewish people as a religious, social, and political entity. M. Lowe for instance understands οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as 'the Judeans', both in the sense of 'people of Judea' and '(religious) authorities of Judea'.[309] Von Wahlde argues that one should distinguish between what he calls the 'neutral' use of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι and its specific Johannine use. References to the Jews as a distinct religious, political and cultural group and references to the Judeans – the inhabitants of Judea or Jerusalem – are 'neutral',[310] the remaining references are specifically Johannine. οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the

307 See for an analysis of the debate about anti-judaism in the Fourth Gospel, R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, F. Vandencasteel-Vanneuville, 'Wrestling with Johannine Anti-Judaism: A Hermeneutical Framework for the Analysis of the Current Debate', *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, 3–46, and von Wahlde, 'Fifteen Years of Research'.

308 Ashton, 'Identity and Function'.

309 See Lowe, "Who Were the ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ?" *NovT* 18 (1976) 101–130.

310 Cf. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews'", with regard to the neutral use see pp. 46–47.

Johannine sense are a group of Jews distinct from people with the same religious, political and cultural background. They are hostile towards Jesus and their hostility is massive and undifferentiated.[311] Having investigated all the instances where οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι occur, von Wahlde concludes that they are to be identified as authorities, with the sole exception of 6,41.52, where they are to be identified as common people, 'the crowd'. More recently, von Wahlde has specified the authoritative Ἰουδαῖοι as people in charge of the synagogue and responsible for the expulsion of members of the Johannine group. Although they were primarily located in Judea, the designation οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι was not intended to refer to 'Judeans' alone, but to authoritative 'Jewish' synagogue officials in the wider sense. Given their portrayal in the Fourth Gospel, a location in Judea is probable, especially considering the parallel with the conflict between the community of Qumran and the religious leaders in Jerusalem, which had taken place in an earlier period.[312] M.C. De Boer does not support the connection with Judea, but does agree with the idea that the term 'the Jews' in the Fourth Gospel is used in a specific an limited sense. In his view, 'the Jews' designates people who reject Jesus as God's envoy and actively plot to arrest and kill him. This may reflect the hostility towards Christian Jews by certain Jewish leaders, but does not yet explain why the evangelist refers to this limited group as 'Jews'. An important clue for solving this problem is to be found in John 9, where we find a schism among the Pharisees: some of them sympathize with Jesus, others are against him. The second group call themselves 'disciples of Moses' (9,28) and obviously consider discipleship to Jesus and discipleship to Moses incompatible. Followers of Jesus are defined as 'non-disciples' of Moses and thereby as 'non-Jews'. In reaction to this outcome of the debate within the synagogue, which

311 Von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews'", 47.

312 Von Wahlde, 'Fifteen Years of Research', 54–55. Motyer and Caron are more or less of the same opinion when they argue that the Johannine Jews represent Jerusalem-based official Judaism, which the evangelist defined as pseudo-Judaism; see Motyer, *Your Father*; and Caron, 'Exploring', (1995) 159–171.

was about Jewish identity, in John 'the Jews' became an ironic, even sarcastic, designation for certain authoritative learned (Pharisaic) Jews and their followers who claimed to be the authoritative arbiters of Jewish identity.[313]

According to Tomson, however, with οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι John refers to the Jewish people of his days as a political, social, and religious entity. In his article on the use of 'Israel' and 'Jews' in ancient Judaism and the New Testament,[314] Tomson argues that 'Israel' is an insider term which Jews use for themselves, whereas 'Jews' is an outside term, used either by non-Jews when referring to Jews, or by Jews themselves when speaking to or in the presence of non-Jews. οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel should not be read symbolically, as a designation of a theological type, but literally, as a reference to real members of the real Jewish people of John's days, whom John regards as outsiders and treats with hostility. Tomson opposes von Wahlde's notion of a 'neutral' use of 'the Jews' in John and is equally negative about the suggestion to render οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as 'Judeans' instead of 'Jews'. Although there are a few inner-Jewish remnants in John (e.g. 4,22) the evangelist's identification is not with Jewish Christians, but with a non-Jewish Christian community.[315]

Whereas von Wahlde, de Boer and Tomson concentrate on the identification or reference of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, Bultmann's discourse is about

313 De Boer, 'The Depiction of 'the Jews' in John's Gospel: Matters of Behavior and Identity', R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (eds.), *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel,* 260–280. De Boer concludes that in the end Johannine Jewish Christians abandoned the term 'the Jews' for themselves as Jewish disciples of Jesus.

314 'The names 'Israel' and 'Jew' in Ancient Judaism and the New Testament', *Bijdr* 47 (1986) 120–140; 266–289. See for criticism of Tomson's view G. Harvey, *The True Israel. Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (AGJu; Leiden: Brill, 1993), and M.H. Williams, 'The Meaning and Function of IOUDAIOS in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions", *ZPE* 116 (1997) 249–262.

315 "'Israel' and 'Jew'", 283.

the sense of the term. Even after decades, Bultmann's symbolic reading still influences Johannine scholarship. According to Bultmann, the Jews in the Fourth Gospel are representatives of the unbelieving 'world',[316] characterized by darkness and lie, while Jesus is light and truth. Like Bultmann, Culpepper, a representative of narrative criticism, emphasizes the uniformity of John's representation, arguing that John's use of the term 'the Jews' and its application to different groups of people means that, eventually, he sees them as one and the same entity.[317] The repeated rising and diminishing of the conflict between Jesus and his audience that is typical of John's narrative explains the alternation of a positive and a negative use of 'the Jews'. Like Bultmann, Culpepper notices that John's hostility towards 'the Jews' is described in universal terms (cf. 5,37.40.42–44; 8,23) and does not seem to be based on their 'Jewishness'. The Jews, like all characters of the story, represent theological ideas. In recent years however, Culpepper has turned to the implications of John's terminology and the anti-Jewish tendencies in the Fourth Gospel, and has come to acknowledge that John's anti-Jewish polemic itself has had great consequences for the shaping of Johannine theology. The depiction of the Jews is only part of the problem: 'At the outset, we should recognize that concentration on the 'hostile' uses of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John—though they are a clear indication of the problem—does not adequately describe John's theological anti-Judaism.'

316 Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (9th ed.: Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), 357; *Johannesevangelium*, 59.

317 Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 126–130.

318 Culpepper, 'Anti-Judaism', 77.

5.2.2. *Historical criticism: the history behind the text*

In 1964, E. Grässer wrote an influential article on the anti-Jewish polemics in the Fourth Gospel.[319] Following the Bultmannian interpretation with regard to the sense of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, the question that concerned him most was why John chose the Jews to represent the unbelieving world. According to Grässer, the reason lies in historical circumstances:[320] the persecution of the Christian community by the Jews, particularly by the insertion of the prayer against heretics (***Birkat ha-minim***) into the Eighteen Benedictions Prayer. Martyn has taken up this line and incorporated it into his reading of John as a two-level drama. He distinguishes between the so-called ***einmalig*** level (Jesus' work in his own time) and the present level (Jesus' present work in the Johannine church),[321] and concludes that the conflict between Jesus and the Jews in the Gospel reflects the real historical conflict between John's community and their opponents, who are representatives of normative Pharisaic Judaism. The word ἀποσυνάγωγος (John 9,22; 12,42 and 16,2) should be read as a reference to the expulsion from the synagogue of those who believed in Jesus in about 85 C.E, when the Sages of Javneh under Gamaliel II introduced or reformulated the ***Birkat ha-minim***.[322] The expulsion, by leading Pharisaic groups, of Christians including (members of) the Johannine community, had

319 Grässer, "Die antijüdische Polemik im Johannesevangelium", *NTS* 10 (1964) 74–90.

320 Grässer, 'Polemik', 86.

321 Martyn, ***History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*** (Nashville, Abingdon ²1979 [= New York, Harper & Row, ¹1968]), 30. In 2003 Westminster John Knox, Louisville, published the third edition of this book as part of The New Testament Library.

322 Martyn argues that from the verb in 9,22, συντίθημι (Hebrew תקן pi'el), we may conclude that we are dealing here with official measures. The only measure we know of that answers this criterium is the (re)formulation of the ***Birkat ha-minim***, ordered by the Sages in Javneh under Gamaliel II (80–115); cf. *b.Ber.* 28b (***History and Theology***, 50–56).

severe consequences and eventually led to the prospect of execution. It proved a decisive point in a gradual process of alienation and separation between John's community and the synagogue, during which Christian Jews became Jewish Christians.[323] In fact, the development of its so-called high christology was one of the ways in which the Johannine community responded to the persecution.

Although Martyn's two-level drama method of interpretation has been found illuminating, his understanding of ἀποσυνάγωγος as a reference to a general excommunication of Christians by the Pharisaic establishment, and his assumption that this excommunication was instigated by the introduction of the ***Birkat ha-minim,*** have gradually come to be

323 Martyn ('Glimpses in the History of the Johannine Community', *The Gospel of John in Christian History. Essays for Interpreters* [New York–Ramsey–Toronto, Paulist, 1978] 93–121) distinguishes three phases in this process: in the first phase, the Johannine group was a messianic faction within the community of the synagogue; they were Christian Jews, probably observant of the Law, with a rather simple understanding of faith. The middle period shows growing tensions: 'The middle period is marked off, indeed, by the fact that the authorities began to be suspicious of the rapidly growing group, and both they and some rank-and-file synagogue members demanded that the group prove the validity of its messianic proclamation on the basis of exegesis' ('Glimpses', 103). At this point, they introduced the Birkat ha-minim, and members of the Johannine group were convicted and executed as seducers and ditheists. This suffering led to new christological formulations (see for instance the logos hymn, which probably stems from this period). The Johannine Christian Jews became Jewish Christians. In the late period the Johannine group became a separate community, with its own identity and theology. It is in this period that we must place the writing of the 'fully Johannine' Gospel in its first and second editions ('Glimpses', 107). Martyn explains the unlikely combinations of Jewish authorities or chief priest and Pharisees (ch. 7) and the occurrence of groups like the officers (7,32.45) and the rulers (9,16) as a result of the two levels that make out the Gospel. Thus, the chief priests belong to the *einmalig* level, while the Pharisees are the opponents of John's community. The officers are to be identified with the chazzanim, who were both Temple police (*einmalig* level) and officers under the Pharisees. The rulers represent members of the einmalig Sanhedrin as well as members of the Gerousia of John's time (*History and Theology*, 84–89).

criticized.[324] To begin with, most scholars are now reluctant to define the parties as massively as Martyn does. Thus, Meeks argues that a) the Pharisees of the Fourth Gospel hardly have Pharisaic characteristics, but remain flatly conventional, and b) discussions in the Fourth Gospel are about beliefs and not about religious practices, not even in a story like John 5. John did not react against the formative rabbinic movement of Yavneh[325] but against the leaders of the local Jewish community, who wanted to get rid of this group of followers of a false Messiah.[326] The Christian movement of John's days was socially independent of the Jewish communities[327] and was ignored by the Jewish leaders. Moreover, there never was a massive confrontation between 'apostolic Christianity' and 'normative Judaism',[328] because there was no 'normative Judaism' before 135 C.E.

Meeks does not stand alone in his scepticism about a massive confron-

324 See for a critical survey of various positions Raimo Hakola, *Identity Matters. John, the Jews and Jewishness* (*NovTSup* Vol. 118; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 41–86, who characterizes some well known assumptions in Johannine research as 'fallacies' in scholarly consensus. Martyn's theory is of course one of them.

325 'Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities', *'To See Ourselves as Others See Us. Christians, Jew, 'Others' in Late Antiquity (ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985) 93–115*, p. 98; Meeks uses the term 'rabbinic'.

326 Meeks, 'Breaking Away', 103.

327 Meeks, 'Breaking Away', 101.

328 Meeks, 'Breaking Away', 115.

329 See on this subject: E.E. Urbach, 'Self-Isolation or Self-Affirmation in Judaism in the First Three Centuries: Theory and Practice', *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition 2: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period* (ed. E.P. Sanders and others; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 269–298; S. Cohen, 'The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism', Hebrew Union College Annual 55 (1984) 27–53; W.D. Davies, 'Reflections on Aspects of the Jewish Background of the Gospel of John', *Exploring the Gospel of John* (ed. R.A. Culpepper en C.C. Black; Louisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 43–64.

tation.[329] Dunn for instance argues that after 70 C.E. the Pharisaic faction continued as before,[330] with the only difference that by having received some authorisation from Rome they had acquired a certain official status. However, it took years before this status gained real importance; in John's days, the Pharisees of Yavneh were not yet in a position to impose their will on all Jewish groups. It was not until 135 C.E. that the separation between Judaism and Christianity was a fact.[331] The general view in present New Testament scholarship is that the end of the first century saw the emergence of what Meeks[332] defines as a 'new form of rabbi-led Judaism', but that it is very uncertain how much influence and power this movement actually had and how its influence was spread geographically when the Fourth Gospel was written. As to Martyn's interpretation of the ἀποσυνάγωγος-texts as reflecting the introduction of the ***Birkat ha-minim***, scholars now tend to question both the link itself and Martyn's supposition that the benediction was an explicitly anti-Christian ***beraka***. R. Kimelman for instance emphasizes that the ***Birkat ha-minim*** was not exclu-

330 Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London/Philadelphia; SCM Press/Trinity Press, 1991), 230–243, esp. pp. 231–232; some of his assumptions however, such as the understanding of ***minim*** as a clear reference to Jewish Christians (p. 132) and the reading of *t. Yad.* 2,13 and *t. Shab.* 13(14),5 as a reference to the gospels may be contested. K.G. Kuhn ('Giljonim und sifre minim', *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias* [ed. W. Eltester; BZNW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1960] 24–61) already argued that the texts of the Tosefta bear no reference to the New Testament texts.

331 As has been argued by Davies, 'Aspects', 46; cf. Dunn, *Partings of the Ways,* 220–229. 243–258. Recent research into the patristic period has shown that even in the centuries that followed the separation between Jews and Christians was not final. Cf. for instance A.H. Becker and A.Y.Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); and the dissertation by Elizabeth Boddens Hosang: *Establishing Boundaries: Christian-Jewish Relations in Early Council Texts and the Writings of Church Fathers* (faculty Catholic Theological University Tilburg) (forthcoming).

332 Meeks, 'Breaking Away', 110.

sively directed against Jews who believed in Jesus, but against *all* dissident Jewish factions, and that the term *notzrim* used in one version of the prayer is a later addition.[333] According to Wengst, the ἀποσυνάγωγος-texts in John, and John 12,42 in particular, do not reflect the introduction of the *Birkat ha-minim*, but a boycott of Jewish Christians by members of the synagogue community.[334] Given the fact that the Johannine group lived in a predominantly Jewish environment, such a boycott must have had severe social and economical implications. Therefore, Bultmann's phrase that the Jews represent the *world* should be taken literally.[335] Wengst, like most others, considers the ἀποσυνάγωγος texts as the expression of a one sided action, through which members of the Johannine community were expelled from the Jewish community. This position has come under scrutiny as well. A. Reinhartz has asked the question whether we are not dealing with a more complicated process, in which Johannine Christians became

333 Cf. R. Kimelman, 'Birkat ha-minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,' in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, II Aspects of Judaims in the Graeco-Roman World* (E. P. Sanders et al., ed; London, 1991), 226–244; P.W. van der Horst, 'The Birkat ha-minim in recent research' in: Van der Horst, *Hellenism-Judaism-Christianity. Essays on their interaction* (CBET 8; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994) 99–111 (reprint of the same article in ExpTim 105 [1993–1994]). In his survey of the state of affairs regarding the Birkat ha-minim, Van der Horst evaluates a number of publications, e.g. Kimelman, 'Birkat ha-minim', S. Katz, 'Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration', *JBL* 103/1 (1984) 43–76) and L. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hoboken, 1985). Van der Horst's own conclusion (p. 11) is that the original *Birkat ha-minim* was never intended to remove Christians from the synagogue, but served to guarantee the cohesion within the Jewish nation in a time of catastrophe.

334 Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde*, 101–104.

335 Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde*, 57. Although Wengst does not picture the Pharisaic movement as a centrally organised, powerful movement as Martyn does, he points out that in some places they must have had enough power and influence to be able to organize a boycott and threaten the lives of dissidents.

336 Reinhartz, '"Jews" and Jews in the Fourth Gospel', *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel. Papers of the Leuven Colloquium*, 339–356, pp 350–353.

alienated from the Jewish community for theological reasons.[336] The Johannine group became ἀποσυνάγωγος because of outside pressure and inside conviction: their christology had made them into strangers to the principles of the Jewish faith and community.

5.2.3. The Jews in the Fourth Gospel: evaluation and questions

The assumptions that a) the Fourth Gospel reflects the controversy between the Johannine community and its Jewish environment, and b) John's community was confronted with Pharisaic normative Judaism, are primarily based on the way in which the evangelist depicts the Jews. We have already pointed out the complexity of this picture: the juxtaposition of various groups, the shifts from specific terms like the 'Pharisees' or 'the chief priests' to the general term 'the Jews', the differentiated use of term itself. The picture of the Jews is predominantly negative, and even when a positive depiction predominates, it has something ambiguous about it.[337] The Jews are principally schematic actors on a theological scene in whom it is difficult to see real life opponents.

Von Wahlde's interpretation of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as a reference to Jewish authorities tends to underestimate the flexibility of the term itself and the fact that all references to the Jews, including those to Jewish festivals and customs, are part of John's theological rhetoric. Conflicts between Jesus and the Jews about his identity take place at the background of important Jewish festivals at which they celebrate their history of salvation and their identity as God's own people.[338]

337 See for instance 4,22: 'salvation is from the Jews'; given the context (4,23–24), this verse can only mean that salvation is from the Jews through Jesus. We have the impression that both exegetes and systematic theologians tend to overrate the 'pro-Jewish' tendency of the verse.

338 Regarding the passion narrative, Culpepper (*Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel,* 129) remarks: 'The Jews legalistically maintain their observance (*continued on page* 184)

References to these festivals are part of John's theological statement[339] that Israel's history has been fulfilled in Jesus, and should therefore not be considered mere background information for a non-Jewish audience.[340] Therefore, the question is whether von Wahlde's distinction between the Johannine and neutral use of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is tenable. Von Wahlde's identification of the authoritative Johannine Jews as people with a Judean background who were in charge of the synagogues inside and outside Judea, does correspond with John's preference for Judea and Jerusalem—and the Temple in particular—as the scene of his story, and with instances like 7,1 and 11,7–8. However, the identification with Judea and Judeans has its limits: passages like 6,41–42 locate the conflict between Jesus and οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in Galilee; moreover, Judea and Jerusalem were the centres of Second Temple Judaism for all Jews, those living in the Jewish heartland and in the Diaspora. The focus on the Temple was an element of Judaism shared by all Jews,[341] not only those with direct links to Judea.[342]

The identification of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι with Pharisees and Pharisaic authorities does not completely correspond with the Johannine picture either. Discussions between Jesus and 'the Jews' and/or 'the Pharisees' do touch upon halakic issues, but these are primarily meant to incite discussions about the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. By doing so, John touches upon the core element of Judaism, belief in one God, and

of the festivals but do not recognize the reality they celebrate. At the festivals they are more concerned to catch Jesus in some offence. Even when a blind man is healed they show no delight, only concern that the law of God's day may have been broken. At the last festival, Passover, instead of celebrating how God spared them and delivered them from a foreign oppressor, they seize Jesus and deliver him to the Romans for execution. Having no king but Ceasar, the world's king, they kill in order to defend their nation and their holy place.'

339 Cf. Grelot (*Les Juifs*, 108): 'On en est alors en pleine théologie johannique.'

340 E.g. von Wahlde, 'The Johannine "Jews"', 46.

341 See Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways*, 247–251.

342 See D. Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism. Jewish and Christian Ethnicity in Ancient Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, ³1997), 288.301.305–320.

creates a unifying picture of religious Judaism in which the particular characteristics of distinctive groups become lost.[343] The protest against the Johannine claims for Jesus would be shared by most, if not all, Jews, whatever their position or affiliation. As to historical arguments in favour of the identification of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι with Pharisaic authorities, the ideas proposed by Martyn are still current among New Testament scholars, although gradually the conviction has gained ground that the Fourth Gospel reflects a local conflict, not a massive confrontation between Johannine Christians and Pharisaic authorities. Whatever the exact extent, means and location of the conflict, most scholars still see it as a conflict in which the Jewish party instigated measures against Johannine Christians. Martyn's suggestion that the Johannine community developed its so-called high christology as a reaction to their affliction may need to be converted into a model of mutual estrangement, as Reinhartz proposes. In the Fourth Gospel itself, conflicts result from Jesus' self-definition. Therefore, one can imagine that Johannine christology itself provoked reactions from (other) Jews because it went against the core of their beliefs, the more so because it was embedded in a shared theological imagery. According to Tomson, the problem of the insider and outsider comes to the open in the use of the outsider term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι for the opponents of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. However, the question is whether John's choice for outsider speech justifies the conclusion that he addresses a non-Jewish Christian audience. Why would not one group of Jews be able to use outsider language against another group?[344] Why would not a group of Johannine Christian Jews use this alienating terminology against other Jews precisely because they are convinced that the others misinterpret Jewish history? Whereas Tomson (and Reinhartz) assume that the alienation was a fact and that one can clearly distinguish between Jews and Christians, the polemics of the Fourth Gospel may also indicate a community in the

343 Caron literally speaks about 'official religious Judaism'.

344 Cf. J. W. van Henten, 'Anti-Judaism in Revelation? A Respons to Peter Tomson', *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, 111–125, pp. 116–117.

middle of this process. In that case, the outsider language is a reflection of this struggle. The question is whether the vehement passage John 8,31–59 does not reflect this struggle as well.

5.3. The Jews in John 8,31–59

In order to identify 'the Jews' in John 8,31–59 and to define their function, one should analyse the pericope on the narrative and historical level. Therefore, the first objective of the following pages is to analyse the way John present the Jews in the narrative itself and its immediate literary context (3.1). The second objective is to situate the narrative and its use of term 'the Jews' in its historical context (3.2). Because Martyn's historical-critical interpretation of John 8,31–59 passage proved a valuable point of reference, we have chosen to formulate our own analysis of the historically significant elements in the text as a reassessment of his reading.

5.3.1. οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι *in John 8,31–59 and its context*

As said before, John 8,31–59 is part of a debate that is taking place in the Temple during the feast of Tabernacles. The debate begins in 7,15, after Jesus has entered the Temple with the purpose of teaching there (7,14), and ends with his departure in 8,59. His opponents are 'the Jews' (7,15.35), 'the crowd' (7,20.31.40.43–44), 'some of the people of Jerusalem' (7,25), 'the Pharisees' (7,32.45.47–48) and 'chief priests' (ibidem). Among most of these groups, there is disagreement about him. 'The Jews' both marvel at his knowledge (7,15) and misunderstand him (7,35–36). 'The crowd' is utterly divided: they either scold him (7,20), or believe in him (7,31). Some say he is the Prophet, others that he is the Christ (7,40), and some think he cannot be the Christ (7,43); others even want to arrest him (7,44). The Pharisees – with Nicodemus

as the sole exception (7,50–51) – are against him (7,32.45–52) and the chief priests are lining up with them (7,45). Of these groups, in 8,12–59 only the Pharisees remain, and they become uniformly hostile.[345] 8,12 sets off where chap. 7 has ended: Jesus once more starts speaking to the Pharisees and they again answer critically (8,13). Jesus' remark that he will go away (8,21) gives rise to a misunderstanding which leads to the debate of 8,31–59. 8,22 shows a shift from 'the Pharisees' to 'the Jews'. Despite the harsh words he has been saying to them (8,24: 'I told you that you would die in your sins') many of the Jews come to belief in Jesus (8,30). The next episode in the debate starts with their designation as 'the Jews who had come to believe him' (8,31).

We have argued before[346] that John 8,30–31 does not provide sufficient evidence to justify the assumption that we are dealing with two different groups. 'The Jews' in John 8,31–59 are the same people as 'the Jews' in 8,20–30, and these 'Jews' are identical to the Pharisees in 8,12–20. Their initial faith in Jesus (*v*31) very soon proves to be inadequate (*vv*33.37–40.41) and even turns into hostility (*vv*48.59). The transition from 'the Jews who had come to believe him' (*v*31) to 'the Jews' as such (*v*48), takes place at the moment when the discussion turns from their identity to the identity of Jesus. Depictions of the way in which the Jews understand themselves are rather sparse in the Fourth Gospel;[347] our pericope, in particular *vv*31–47, is one of the few occasions in which their self-definition receives full attention.

John 8,12–59 gives a predominantly negative picture of Jesus' oppo-

345 See for an analysis of John 8,12–20 M. J. J. Menken, 'Jezus tegenover de Farizeeën in het vierde evangelie: Joh. 8,12–20', *Jodendom en vroeg christendom: continuïteit en discontinuïteit. Opstellen van leden van de Studiosorum Novi Testamenti Conventus* (ed. T. Baarda, H. J. de Jonge, M. J. J. Menken; Kampen: Kok, 1991) 103–117.

346 See chapter 2 section 2.1 of this study.

347 An explicit self-definition is given in 9,28.

nents. 'The Pharisees' appear as people who contradict and misunderstand him (*vv*12–20), 'the Jews' are people 'from below' and 'from this world', bound to end up dying in their sins (*vv*23–24). The descriptions of 'the Jews' as sinful people and people from this world will recur in 8,34 and 8,42–47. In the latter verses, we find that they are not God's children, but children of the devil, fundamentally incapable of hearing and understanding Jesus. *Vv*30–31 are a pause in the midst of the animosity of John 8,12–59, but a very temporary one: in *v*32 it becomes obvious that the protagonists of *vv*30–31 are in need of encouragement in order to become true believers: 'If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples.' Their embryonic faith is wrecked at the assurance that they only can attain real freedom when remaining faithful to Jesus (*v*33).

For the Jews in John 8,31–59, the quintessence of their creed and self-understanding is their belief in one God and their special relationship with Him, a relationship of which Abraham is the symbol. Their outlook on the promise to Abraham as a guarantee for freedom ('we have never been slaves to anybody', *v*33) determines their view of history.[348] In *v*39, they again refer to their kinship with Abraham, and repetitions of this reference occur in *vv*52.53.57. The conviction of having a special relationship to God through Abraham underlies the entire pericope, and becomes explicit in *v*41 and *vv*58–59: in *v*41 the Jews say that they have but one father, God;[349] they understand Jesus' pre-existence (*vv*58) as a blasphemous denial of the oneness of God (8,59; cf. 5,17–18; cf. 10,31–33; 19,7).

348 Previously, the evangelist has referred to Moses (5,45–47) to show that his Jewish opponents do not interpret their history correctly. Since Abraham and Moses are witnesses to Jesus, the claim that Abraham is their father as well as the argument that they are disciples of Moses (9,28) become ambiguous. The evangelist does not deny that the Jews are 'seed of Abraham', nor does he contradict directly that they are 'disciples of Moses'. But since they seek to kill Jesus (8,40) they are not really entitled to call Abraham their father, and given the fact that they do not believe Moses, they cannot be his disciples either.

349 Cf. 19,15, where the chief priests say that they have no king but Caesar [sic!].

John questions both aspects of their self-definition. As to the first aspect, their descent from Abraham and relation with him, he cannot deny that they are Abraham's offspring in the flesh, but he does deny that they are his children in spirit and deed: only of Jesus, who firmly believe in his word, can be true children of Abraham. The Jews' belief in God is considered inadequate: by refusing to accept Jesus, they show that they are unable to hear and understand the word of God. Their intention to kill him shows that they belong to the devil (*vv*44–47). Given this outcome, it is not surprising that the original specification 'who had come to believe in him' in *v*31, has vanished in *v*48.

In *vv*52.57, 'the Jews' occurs in a series of misunderstandings about the identity of Jesus in which the appeal to Abraham and knowing God become intertwined. Jesus' opponents have not given up their reliance upon Abraham and again appeal to him in their opposition to Jesus' claim of having authority over life and death (*vv*51–53). The appeal to Abraham in *v*57 results from their (mis)understanding of *v*56, where Jesus said that Abraham had been a witness to him, but which they take for the opposite: 'How is it that you saw Abraham?' The misunderstanding gives Jesus another opportunity to annex Abraham for the proclamation of his own pre-existence (*v*58), an utterance of blasphemy that in its turn adds fuel to their intention to kill Jesus (cf. *vv*38.44) and to their actual attempt to stone him.

In sum: in our pericope, John pictures 'the Jews' as people who initially are attracted to Jesus. They have come to believe (ἔλεγεν οὖν οἱ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους, *v*31) and are encouraged to keep their faith. Being believers, they are addressed in 'insider' language (*v*32; cf. John 15, 1–10): 'If you remain in my word you will truly be my disciples.' However, when it comes to the proclamation of Jesus as guarantee for freedom, their belief in Jesus is taken over by the conviction that they are already free through their descent from Abraham. At that point, they start questioning Jesus' claim. According

to John, their religious self-identification prevents them from seeing their history in the true, christological perspective. Therefore, they are called 'the Jews' (*v*48) without the attribute 'believing'.

The shift from πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους (*v*31) to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (*v*48) and the rash change from initial benevolence toward Jesus (*v*31) to critical questioning (*v*33), as well as repeated references to their intentions to kill Jesus (*vv*37.40) are part of Johannine polemics,[350] in which rather one-dimensional characters have a symbolic function. On the other hand, when read as a two-level drama, the question imposes itself whether our pericope does not reflect a real historical situation. We would therefore propose to explain the tension in John 8,31–59 from the coincidence of a radical christology and internal and external tensions that at least partly evolved from this theology.

5.3.2. John 8,31–59: the history behind the text

In one of the essays in his book *The Gospel of John in Christian History. Essays for Interpreters,*[351] Martyn argues that John 8,31–59 should be situated within the last phase of the conflict between the Johannine community and the synagogue dominated by the Pharisees. He identifies 'the Jews' in John 8,31–59 as apostates of the Johannine group who are dividing their loyalty between Christ and the synagogue, between Jesus and Moses. That they are law-observing Jews like in the Pauline letters appears from the participle πεπιστευκότας (*v*31a), which in itself is a designation for Jewish Christians, as Acts 21,20 demonstrates.[352] The second indication of their being Jewish Christians

350 Cf. the changes of attitude in John 7,14-52.

351 Martyn, 'Glimpses, 90–121.

352 '(...) You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed (τῶν πεπιστευκότων); they are all zealous for the law.'

is the self-designation 'descendants of Abraham', which in 2 Cor 11, 22 and Gal 3, 6–29 is used for Paul's Jewish-Christian adversaries. In John, the term 'descendants of Abraham' has a double function: it helps these people to identify themselves towards other Christians as a particular group of Christians, and towards other Jews as real Jews. Their particularity is that they oppose John's 'high christology' and underline monotheism.

Having identified them as Jewish Christians, Martyn points out that the adversaries of Jesus in John 8,31–59 are keeping up a double allegiance, to Christ and to the synagogue: ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τω λογῳ τῷ ἐμῷ ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μού ἐστε (*v*31bc) should be read as 'If you take a constant stand absolutely in ***my*** word, you are ***truly*** my disciples...' The particular grammatical construction of 'my word' – i.e. a possessive pronoun plus article following a noun: ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμω – means to emphasize this particular word, the word of ***Jesus*** (*vv*31b.37), and suggests that the author's concern is with the double allegiance to Jesus and another teacher. From the Johannine perspective however, double allegiance means that there is no real allegiance with Jesus. Therefore, *v*31c mentions the importance of being truly disciples of Jesus.

At this point, Martyn takes the step into history. The formulations in *vv*31.37 reflect the circumstances of the day: during the period before the present conflict, the Jewish authorities had told members of John's community that they could not be disciples of Jesus and disciples of Moses (9,28) at the same time. In the present phase of the conflict, according to John, the time has come to give absolute priority to Jesus' word and to conclude that a double allegiance is no longer possible. Because of this situation, John's christology becomes dualistic in its terminology and more radical in its outlook: one is from above, from God, or from below, from the devil.[353] In *v*37 it is clear that the word of Jesus has not yet established itself among the believing Jews of

353 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 112–113.

v 31. They turn out to be so-called believers, whose double allegiance has failed and proved to be a diabolic lie (*v* 44). Because they have become traitors, informers of the Pharisaic authorities, the devil must be their father.

Martyn's identification of 'the Jews' in John 8,31–59 as Jewish Christians with a double allegiance does indeed explain much of the vehemence of the pericope. However, one should ask whether a) the identification of the Jews in *v* 31 does not rely too much on Acts and Paul; b) the accent should not be more on the issue of discipleship instead of competition between two teachers, and c) the attribution to a particular phase in the community's history is tenable.

a) With regard to John 8,31, Martyn suggests that the perfect participle πεπιστευκότες is more or less a terminus technicus for Jewish Christians. It is obvious that πεπιστευκότες applies to Jewish converts in Acts 15,5 and 21,20. This is not the case, however, in other instances;[354] moreover, there is a substantial difference between the Jewish Christians propagating circumcision and observance of the Law for Jews in Acts 21,20, and the 'believing' Jews in John 8,31–59 whose main concern is not ***halaka***, but the proclaimed pre-eminence of Jesus. Similar objections can be made against Martyn's explanation of the designation 'descendants of Abraham'. Apart from the fact that both context and purpose of this designation in John 8,31–41 differ from the context and purpose in 2 Cor 11,22 and Galatians 3 – descent from Abraham as a means of inclusion versus descent from Abraham as a means of exclusion – we have seen that John distinguishes between 'seed of Abraham' and 'children of Abraham'. Martyn ignores the distinction and indiscriminately uses the word 'descendants'.
b) According to Martyn, the designation 'descendants of Abraham'

354 Acts 16,34; 18,27; 19,18 and 21,25.

emphasizes the 'Jewishness' of its bearers and therefore implies a ***double allegiance***. However, the question is whether the Fourth Gospel implies anything of the sort. 'Seed of Abraham' seems to emphasize physical descent, 'children of Abraham' tends to emphasize the social, ethical and spiritual aspect of being a descendant of Abraham; therefore, 'seed of Abraham' tends to be a designation of Jews who do not abide with Jesus, whereas 'children of Abraham' designates those who do follow him and will inherit life (8,51). Martyn's second argument in favour of double allegiance relies on a specific reading of *v*31bc (ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λογῷ τῷ ἐμῷ ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μού ἐστε). Unlike Martyn, we think the emphasis in the phrase is on the first words 'if you remain' (ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε), not on the words that follow, 'in my word' (ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ). The grammatical construction used here (a possessive pronoun plus article following a noun plus article) occurs frequently in John and is one of its distinctive stylistic features.[355] Comparison with other instances teaches that the construction is a ***stylistic*** particularity of John and not intended to emphasize a particular word or theme. Therefore, ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ should be translated as a neutral 'in my word', not as 'in ***my*** word'. There is no suggestion of competition with the words of another teacher; if there were, John would have mentioned the other party or person involved, as he does in other instances.[356] The problem is not that of a choice between Jesus and

355 The combination of a possessive pronoun with article after an article plus noun occurs 29 times in the Fourth Gospel, once in the Johannine letters and nowhere else in the New Testament; cf. Ruckstuhl/Dschulnigg, ***Einheit***, 74–75 were this construction is listed as characteristic n. A 11. In our pericope it is relatively frequent: 8,31.37.43.43.56. In some cases we find this construction alongside the more usual construction with the genitive form of the personal pronoun, without any difference of meaning (see John 14,15.21; 15,9.10).

356 Cf. John 5,30 ('not my will but the will of the one who sent me'); 6,38 ('[not] my will but the will of the one who sent me'); 7,6 ('my time has not yet come, your time is always there'); see chapter 2 section 2.2 of the present study.

the synagogue, but between remaining and not remaining in Jesus' word, a theme typical for the Fourth Gospel: cf. 6,60–71; 15,1–10 and 18,15–18.25–27. This interpretation has the advantage of being more in line with the second part of the phrase: '(if you ***remain*** in my word) then you will ***truly*** be my disciples' (*v* 31c). Martyn's suggestion that John 8,44 reflects a situation in which the Johannine community experienced betrayal, does find support in pericopes about the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot in 6,70 and 13,2.27. John 6,60–71 has more traits in common with John 8,31–47: according to 6,60, certain disciples find the preaching of Jesus 'hard' (σκληρός ἐστιν ὁ λόγος οὗτος, cf. 8,31: ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τ ῷ λογῷ τῷ ἐμῷ). Like the disciples in 8,43, they ask themselves to whom Jesus' words will be acceptable (6,60: τίς δύναται αὐτοῦ ἀκούειν; cf. 8.34: ὅτι οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμόν). In John 6,60–71 as well as John 8,31–47, betrayal results from the essential inability to follow Jesus, not from competition between two masters.

c) Martyn situates John 8,31–59 in a particular phase in the history of the Johannine community. However, the proposed reconstruction is problematic for various reasons. No reconstruction of the historical background of a text exclusively based on data from this text itself exceeds the level of mere hypothesis.[357] Even attempts to connect it with data outside the text prove to be difficult; we have already pointed out the problems with the connection between the ***aposunagogoi*** texts in John and the ***Birkat ha-minim***. In the presupposed conflict between the Johannine community and its Pharisaic opponents, Martyn considers John 8,31–59 to be the radicalisation of 9,28: 'And they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciples but we are disciples of Moses.'" Although it is not unlikely that John 8,31–59 and John 9 do reflect a historical conflict, we do not know with any certainty how this conflict developed. The reflections of it in the Fourth Gospel itself are part of a specific literary and theological context. The Fourth Gospel is a theological,

and not a historical document. Other passages about Moses, like John 5,45–47 and 7,19, inevitably colour John 9,28, with the effect that 9,28 has an ironic and perhaps even sarcastic tone. In fact, the text suggests that the Pharisees or 'Jews' of John 9 cannot be true disciples of Moses, since only disciples of Jesus can be so. Within the Fourth Gospel in its final form, the opposition Jesus-Abraham in 8,31–59 is hardly more radical than the opposition Jesus-Moses in 9,28. The same is true of the Jews' self-assertion: their remarks in 9,28 and 8,39 are on the same level.

In sum, it seems that in John 8,31–59 the conflict is not about a choice between two alternatives, but about the radical choice for Jesus as the Son. The inability of the devotees in John 8,31 to take this step stems from their attachment to traditional interpretations of Jewish theological concepts like descent from Abraham and belief in the one God. Although they are the same people as in 8,13, they have no obvious Pharisaic features. This may be due to the subject matter of the debate: christology, not *halaka*. John's christology itself as well as his interpretation of core elements of the Jewish faith – monotheism, election through Abraham – would probably have provoked reactions from any Jewish group. The negative reactions from a group of Jews in 8,31–59 need therefore not be defined as typically Pharisaic.[358]

358 Motyer (*Your Father*, 160–210) understands our pericope from the political situation after the Jewish war and the destruction of the Temple. He interprets John from the perspective of the reader. This reader, having experienced the disastrous events just mentioned, was searching for consolation and hope. According to Motyer, the implied reader holds on to Abraham as the sign and guarantee of God's covenant with the Jewish people. John 8 should therefore be regarded as an invitation to cooperative readers (and not to convinced supporters of Yavneh) to believe in Jesus, the Son, as an alternative for all that had been lost. The evangelist takes up motifs and ideas that were familiar to the implied reader and reinterpreted them in a way that must have appealed to him or her. Motyer's impressive exposition of parallels and examples from literature contemporary to John gives a good insight in John's religious *Umwelt*. Nevertheless, one must ask if Motyer's basic assumptions about the intention of the Fourth (*continued on next page*)

5.4. *John 8,31–59: strengthening the community*

Our pericope describes a conflict between Jesus and a group of followers designated as 'the Jews who had come to believe him'. The text probably reflects a conflict between Johannine Christians and a group of new Jewish believers who prove themselves unable to believe that Jesus is the Son and return to their former beliefs. Its vehemence can be explained from the situation of the community. From the ***aposunagogoi*** texts (9,22; 12,42; 16,2) we learn that the there was no longer any place for Johannine believers within the synagogue, either because they were expelled from the Jewish community, or because they became strangers to it themselves, or because of a combination of both developments. Reinhartz stresses that the radical character of John's theology may have significantly contributed to the estrangement between both groups and even to the conflict itself. What role does John 8,31–59 play in this process?

The transition from τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους (*v* 31) to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (*v* 48) shows some ambiguity. The believing Jews in *v* 31 stop being believers and become 'the Jews', from insiders they become out-

Evangelist and the characterization of the implied reader are entirely convincing. Firstly, the almost total absence of references to other New Testament writings in *Motyers* picture of the literary and religionsgeschichtliche *Umwelt* of John 8 and its readers is a serious deficiency. John's interests and interpretations become particularly clear when they are compared with motifs and interpretations from e.g. the Synoptics; for our pericope this is particularly urgent for the appeal to remain in the word of Jesus and for John's understanding of descent from Abraham. Secondly, John sometimes supposes his readers to be already familiar with Christian ideas (cf. 7,42). This makes it more probable that John's implied reader was a member of the Johannine community. Thirdly, Motyer tends to neglect the appeal to remain (*v* 31b) in favour of the appeal to become a disciple of Jesus. John's point is that by remaining the reader becomes a true disciple of Jesus. Fourthly, although in first century polemics harsh language was a common thing, it should be asked if utterances like *v* 44 ("You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires") would be very inviting to the type of reader Motyer describes. See for this latter point also von Wahlde, 'Fifteen years of research', 33.

siders. But the debate does not stop with *v*48: like some other debates in the Fourth Gospel, it becomes an external debate between Jesus/John and the Jews. This means that the internal conflict about the identity and beliefs of these apostates (*v*31) – as contrasted to the identity and beliefs of the remaining members of the Johannine community, who believe Jesus to be the Son – is closely entwined with an external conflict. John's community was obviously in conflict with its parental home, the Jewish community, which it had come to see as a body of outsiders;[359] but it had it to deal with internal tensions as well. This internal conflict led eventually to the labelling of a number of Johannine believers as 'outsiders'. John 8,31–59 seems to reflect a process of action and reaction, in which Johannine Christians and a group of Jews are seeking to define their own identity *vis à vis* the other. On the Johannine side, it is characterized by a double strategy: on the one hand, John urged the members of his community to remain faithful to their creed that 'Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20,31), on the other hand, he sought to discredit beliefs that were sacred to his opponents.[360] This double strategy becomes particularly obvious in two fundamental issues of John 8,31–59: discipleship and the appeal to Abraham.

359 Cf. De Ruyter, *De gemeente van de evangelist Johannes*. Although he rightly concludes that John 8,31-59 reflects a conflict within the Johannine community, his argument that the entire conflict between Jesus and the Jews in the Fourth Gospel should be regarded as the reflection of an internal Christian struggle does not sound very convincing: it should not be ignored that the 'Jewishness' of the opponents is predominantly pictured as a negative characteristic.

360 Cf. S. Freyne, 'Vilifiying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus', *To See Ourselves as Others See Us*, 117–143. Freyne ('Vilifying the Other,' 132) mentions two tactics: 1) discrediting the opponents at the point where particular and exclusive claims for one's own community need to be established, and 2) using the opponent's failures and inadequacies as a means of warning one's own community.

5.4.1 Discipleship

Discipleship is an important motif throughout the Fourth Gospel. From the Johannine perspective, being a disciple of Jesus implies a radical and uncompromising adherence to the Son. In the Fourth Gospel narrative the one and only character matching this standard is the beloved disciple (13,23; 19,26.27; 21,20.24) or 'other disciple' (18,15.16; 20,4). All other disciples are wavering in their faith.[361] Peter's zeal (cf. 6,68–69; 13,8–9; 18,10) for instance, does not stand the test of the arrest of Jesus. In John's version of the story of Peter's denial, Peter is characterized as a ***disciple*** of Jesus (18,15–18.25–27), a detail absent from the Synoptics.[362] The same detail occurs in the passage about the interrogation by the High Priest, when Annas asks Jesus about his ***disciples*** and his teaching (18,19).

Another crucial passage about trustworthy discipleship is 6,60–71. We have already referred to John 6,60, where many disciples are said to turn away from Jesus because of his 'hard' teaching. Among the remaining disciples one finds Peter, who calls Jesus 'God's Holy One' (6,69), but also Judas, who will betray him (6,71; cf. 13,27.30; 18,2–5). Peter and Judas personify different kinds of discipleship, and so do other characters: Thomas is the sceptic, who must see before he believes (20,24–29); Joseph of Arimathea is the prototype of the 'secret disciple' (19,38). Philip and Nathanael voice other reasons for believing Jesus. From Philip's perspective, Jesus is the one about whom Moses and the prophets have written (1,45), Nathanael is impressed by

361 See for the role of the minor characters in John, C.M. Conway, 'Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel', ***BibInterpr*** 10.3(2002) 324–341. According to Conway, there are two static and predictable characters in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus and Judas (331). Peter is a more complex and somewhat ambivalent personality, like Nicodemus (332). According to Conway, even the attitude of the beloved disciple, the 'disciple par excellence', is not without ambiguity (338–339).

362 See Matth 26,69–76; Mark 14,66–72; Luke 22,54–62.

the fact that Jesus has seen him even before having met him (1,41–53). Nicodemus is a Pharisee who sympathizes with Jesus, but he is never called a 'disciple' (3,1.4.9; 7,50; 19,39).

John's appeal to the devotees to remain in the word of Jesus and become real disciples (*v* 31–32; cf. 15,1–10) and his sketch of the characters in the story give reason to assume that they reflect positions and conflicts within his own community. If this is the case, John 8,31–59, like John 6,60–71, may reflect the experience of the community of seeing a number of its members turning away, because their attachment to traditional and fundamental Jewish beliefs made it impossible for them to remain adherents of the Johannine group with its 'high' christology.[363] Martyn's suggestion to identify them more precisely as people with a judaizing mission comparable to Paul's adversaries in Acts 21 is unnecessary and does not find support in the text itself.

5.4.2 The appeal to Abraham

The appeal to remain in Jesus' word and become real disciples may be defined as an example of positive support towards wavering devotees. The appeal to Abraham falls into the category of discrediting the other by questioning his views and appropriating what is part of his legacy, in order to strengthen one's own group. The Jews consider themselves free because they are descendants of Abraham, but their freedom turns out to be a form of slavery (8,33.34–36); their

363 Cf. the extensive article by M. Rissi, 'Die 'Juden' im Johannesevangelium', *ANRW* II, 26/3(1996) 2099–2041. According the Rissi, the term 'the Jews' has various meanings, but is connected with Judaea. In the Fourth Gospel one should distinguish between unbelieving (in the Johannine sense) Jews and believing Jews. The Jews in John 8,30–59 belong to the second category. They are to be identified with Jewish Christians in John's own community who do not remain in the word of Jesus, despite the fact that inititially they are believers. They turn back to the belief that their Jewish heritage is the ground of their salvation. In the end, John says, this group does not differ much from their Jewish environment.

pride to have Abraham as their father is taken away from them (*v* 39). The power of Jesus over life and death (*vv* 52–53) and his pre-existence (*vv* 56–58) even overrule the greatness of Abraham. Those who follow Jesus obviously do what Abraham did and have him as their father (cf. 39–40), they can claim Abraham as a witness to the Son (*v* 56). Those who believe in Jesus now enjoy all privileges that the Jews have as children of Abraham and children of God. From the theological outlook of the Johannine community, the wavering insiders are on the wrong side of the line: they are traitors like Judas and therefore children of the devil. In the end, they are outsiders with the beliefs of outsiders. Their appeal to Abraham in the second part of our pericope (*vv* 52–53) is inadequate. All features of Abraham that make him into a great man and a model – his faith and obedience, his being partner in the covenant and the guarantee for freedom, and his being the man to whom God revealed himself and granted a vision of the future – have become part of Johannine theology and Johannine (Jewish) Christian identity.

John's habit of rewording and reinterpreting the arguments of his opponents makes it difficult to identify them and to discern their own specific concerns. The occurrence of Abraham within the debate does not help to identify them either. Abraham is the founding father and personification of the bond between Israel and God. The Old Testament and early Jewish writings attest this double role in a variety of stories and characterizations, and the same is true of the New Testament and rabbinic literature. In all these writings, the depiction of Abraham responds to the needs of the authors and their communities.[364] Though fundamentally relying on early Jewish traditions, the picture of Abraham thus reflects the concerns of the Johannine community as a group under pressure holding on to its radical theology.

364 Cf. Siker (*Disinheriting*, 14): 'an analysis of the use of Abraham in Christian writings from Paul through Justin Martyr can serve as an effective heuristic device for assessing the character of early Christian controversy with Judaism.'

But does it also reflect the concerns of the other party? This hardly seems to be the case.

The argument of the Jews that they are free (*v* 33) relies on their self-identification as 'seed of Abraham'. In the Old Testament, Abraham is already seen as the man of the promise, as the guarantee for Israel's redemption, and more specifically for the Exodus. The picture of Abraham as a noble and free man occurs, among others, in the writings of Philo and Josephus. In this respect, John 8,33 may be an authentic echo of contemporary Jewish concerns. However, the initiative for the discourse about freedom lies with Jesus, and the way it is formulated makes the option that it is an authentic echo of Jewish concerns less likely.[365] If ever John 8,31–37 is based on a historical controversy, *v* 33 is probably a reformulation of the original argument. The self-identification of the Jews of John 8 as 'seed of Abraham' (*v* 33) and their reference to Abraham as their father (*v* 39.52) may very well be genuine.[366] From the Johannine viewpoint, however, these designations lose their significance and turn into a lie. In the second part of the dialogue (*vv* 48–59), Abraham occurs as the point of identification for Jesus. The association of Abraham with the prophets is rare, but not unique to John. In this part of the pericope, the problem arises that the Jews diminish the importance of Abraham by declaring him a mortal being. They do so in order to undermine the Johannine argument in *v* 51 about life and death, but they are so occupied with

365 There are several reasons for regarding John 8,33 as suspect. We know that John goes quite far in distorting the arguments of his opponents. A notorious example to which we have alluded previously is to be found in 19,15, where the chief priests argue that they have no king but Caesar. An argument in favour of the historicity of John 8,33 in its present form may be found in Josephus, *J.W.* 7,323. However, although the text from Josephus shows that an appeal to political freedom of Israel by a blinded faction was not unknown, we must admit that Josephus, like John, is perhaps not the most reliable witness. Josephus' judgement about the Zealots is notoriously negative, since he holds them and other fanatic Jewish factions responsible for the disaster of 70 C.E. John and Josephus may have had the same intention: to discredit their opponents.

366 Cf. Rom 4,1.12; 9,7; 11,1; Gal 3,7.29; Matt 3,7–10; Luke 3,7–9.

contradicting high christology, that they neglect to phrase their arguments effectively. By consequence, their ill-expressed arguments are used as weapons in favour of the theology they oppose. The portrayal of Abraham in *vv*56–57 is Jewish in the sense that it took its imagery from Jewish traditions of the time.[367] The question in *v*57 ('You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?') is probably Johannine, a necessary hinge to the self-proclamation of Jesus in *v*58. Put on the lips of the Jews, it is uncommon and too much part of typically Johannine misunderstanding to be reckoned as a historically reliable argument of John's adversaries.

5. *Conclusions*

The original purpose of this chapter was to investigate the role of John 8,31–59 as a hallmark in the debate between early Christianity and Judaism at the end of the first century C.E. In the course of this investigation, the question arose whether such a massive interpretation of the conflict was adequate; consequently, the question arose whether John 8,31–59 should be considered a reliable and significant witness of a multi-phased, linear process. The close reading in chapter 2 had already made clear that our pericope should not be isolated from the Fourth Gospel as a whole, but that it is a well-integrated component of a coherent literary composition. Therefore, we will first summarize here the results of this study with regard the Fourth Gospel in general.

a. John's audience was a particular group, an 'in-crowd'. The typical language of the Fourth Gospel and stylistic features such as irony and misunderstanding, as well as issues like discipleship and 'remaining' in the word of Jesus are indications for the inside character of John.

367 For Abraham as a seer cf. e.g. *Ap. Abr.* 15,31; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 4,4; for the theme of Abraham's joy cf. e.g *Jub.* 15,7; Philo, *L.A.* 3,217–218.

b. Theological concerns and concerns about his community coloured John's picture of his opponents and their arguments. Therefore, one should ask to what extent the words put on the lips of 'the Jews' and related groups, reflect the actual arguments of John's Jewish or Jewish-Christian opponents.

c. The assumption of many scholars that the Jews opposing the Johannine community belonged to Pharisaic circles does not convincingly emerge from the subject matter of the debate. Halakic issues are not being discussed for their own sake, but as mere preambles to christological discourses. In John, arguments between Jesus and 'the Jews'/the Pharisees are primarily about monotheism and the interpretation of the Old Testament, subjects that can hardly be regarded as typically or exclusively Pharisaic.[368] The identification of Jews with Pharisees stems from the fact that in the Fourth Gospel the terms 'the Jews' and 'the Pharisees' repeatedly designate the same people.

d. After 70 C.E., the Pharisaic movement took over the leading role in Judaism. This must have been a gradual process: it is not clear how great and extensive the power and influence of the so-called movement of Yavneh were in John's days, but they were probably less extensive than New Testament scholars assumed some decades ago. It is therefore unlikely that John echoes a massive conflict between two competing movements, i.e. early Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism. We are probably dealing with limited or perhaps even local tensions. According to the Fourth Gospel itself, authoritative Jews/Pharisees expelled (Johannine) Christians from

368 Cf. H.J. De Jonge ('Jewish Arguments against Jesus at the End of the First Century C.E. according to the Gospel of John", *Aspects of Religious Contact and Conflict in the Ancient World* [ed. P. W. van der Horst; Utrechtse theologische reeks; Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid Universiteit Utrecht, 1995] 45–55), who argues that John 12,34; 7,12 and 7,24 reflect real Jewish objections against Christian theology. But De Jonge too refrains from presenting these objections as Pharisaic: he speaks about 'non-Christian Jews in the late first century C.E.'

the synagogue (9,22; 12,42; cf. 16,2). Probably we must reckon with a more complicated process of action, reaction, and estrangement than John seems to suggest. Whatever may have been the case, we must acknowledge that the reflection of the tensions within the Johannine community and between this community and its surroundings in the Fourth Gospel has had a lasting negative influence on Christian views on Judaism and Jews throughout the centuries.

As for John 8,31–59 and its place within the debate between early Christian groups and their Jewish contemporaries in general, we should reckon with similar difficulties.

a) John 8,31–59 reflects the evangelist's concerns about his community. The emphasis on discipleship and the appeal to remain faithful (*vv* 31–32) reflect an internal discussion. The designation 'the Jews' (*v* 48) marks the shift from 'inside' to 'outside'.

b) John 8,31–59 is strongly marked by John's own theological concerns. Although the central issue in *vv* 31–41[a] is the identity of a group of Jewish-Christians in relation to Abraham,[369] John's christological outlook incites and colours all the arguments in the debate. One should be careful, therefore, to label these arguments as actually used by the opponents of the Johannine group. In other words, although John 8,31–59 may give us some subjective hints about a local conflict, it does not provide us with a reliable and

369 Siker (*Disinheriting*, 143) goes a step further and suggests that Jews are excluded from genuine kinship to Abraham in favour of Gentile believers: '...the very ones who make no claim based on genetic descent, and who might not qualify as 'descendants of Abraham,' are seen to be 'children of Abraham,' genuine children, on account of their belief in and witness to Jesus as the Christ.' We would not go as far as Siker, since in our pericope the question is not whether Gentile Christians can be Abraham's children, but whether the group of Jewish Christians John has in view matches the standard to become Abraham's children. Again, the problem does not lie in the opposition between believers of Gentile and Jewish origin, but in the opposition between true and untrue believers.

objective picture of this conflict, let alone with a reliable and objective picture of the process of estrangement between Christians and Jews in general in the first century C.E.

6

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the place of John 8,31–59 in the conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish environment, and, more specifically, to investigate the role of Abraham in both the text itself and its historical context. To begin with the level of the text: the literary reading of John 8,31–59 in chapter 1 and 2 of this study has shown that John 8,31–59 is a stylistic, literary and conceptual unity. The subsequent tradition-historical investigation (chapter 3 and 4) has demonstrated that John's picture of Abraham in John 8,31–59 depends on early Jewish traditions, which the evangelist reshaped and incorporated into his own theology. Reshaping and incorporating were in fact one and the same procedure, for John did not alter the traditional images of Abraham in themselves, he changed their meaning by giving them a place in a new context, and this made Abraham into a new figure: a witness to Jesus and a father of those who believe in Jesus.

As for the place of Abraham in the presupposed conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish environment, it is likely that the figure of Abraham and the relationship between Abraham and the Jews was part of the controversy between the Johannine group and their opponents. We know from other New Testament writings that the interpretation of this relationship was a point of discussion between (Jewish and/or Gentile) Christians and (Christian and non-Christian) Jews. John 8,31–59 seems to reflect a specific aspect of the conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish environment, i.e. the discipline and loyalty of members of the Johannine group itself living under pressure from the outside. Therefore, before one decides upon the extent and reliability of John's picture of Abraham in a Jewish-Christian conflict,

one should reckon with this internal character and some other peculiarities in our pericope, as well as some literal and theological characteristics of the Fourth Gospel in general.

In order to illustrate the arguments just mentioned, we now give a brief and simplified summary of the most important results of this study concerning the characteristics, origin and purpose of John's picture of Abraham.

1. The most important characteristic of the Johannine Abraham is the fact that he is the forefather of the Jews and at the same time the father of those who believe in Jesus. Other significant features are his being exemplary in belief, and, above all, his being a witness to the glory of Jesus. The Johannine picture of Abraham is fragmentary in the sense that it elaborates various aspects of Abraham's personality; it is also full of tensions because it not only reflects John's reasoning, but also the arguments of his opponents, although the presentation of their arguments is less extensive and far less reliable. On the other hand, John's picture of Abraham shows a remarkable consistency because it has become part of John's coherent christological argumentation.
2. With regard to the origin of the Johannine picture of Abraham, for most of its elements parallels are to be found in the Old Testament as well as in other New Testament writings and early Jewish literature. The origins of some elements prove difficult to establish; this is particularly the case with the rare combination of Abraham's 'vision' and 'joy' in 8,56. Genesis 18 and the reception of this text in Jewish sources provide promising clues, but the closest parallel to John 8,56 is to be found in the interpretation of Genesis 15 in *Jubilees*. From this similarity between John and Jubilees need not automatically follow that John was acquainted with *Jubilees*. The Johannine interpretation may have been inspired by or derived from *Jubilees*, but there is also the possibility that John

and *Jubilees* are based on another common source or tradition.

3. With regard to the relation between John and the Abraham cycle in Genesis, it appears that Genesis 15, 18 and 21 are the most relevant for the understanding of John's picture of Abraham. In these chapters, the elements of John's 'Abrahamology' occur prominently: the picture of the household (John 8,35) in Genesis 21, Abraham's reception of God's envoy (John 8,39–41) in Genesis 18, and Genesis 15 throughout the pericope. John 8,33 appears to be a direct allusion to Genesis 15; the picture of Abraham in other instances of our pericope seems to be inspired by the Genesis text as interpreted in existing traditions. The (interpreted) text of Genesis 15 seems to be the key passage for the understanding of John's picture of Abraham. Within the Abraham cycle, Genesis 15 connects Abraham's life and ways with the future of his descendants. In Genesis 15, God promises Abraham a son and the land; he reminds Abraham of his origin as a Chaldaean stranger, but also predicts Israel's exodus from slavery. Abraham's sacrifice alludes to the cult in the Temple. This association of Abraham's deeds and belief with the experience of his descendants, and their future history with his present life, gives Israel a firm foundation. Perhaps because of this specific character of Genesis 15, exegetical traditions about Genesis 15 seem to be predominant in John 8,31–59.
4. John's treatment of Gen 15,13–14 is illustrative for the way he handles extant traditions. John has two reasons for incorporating these verses. In the first place, he uses Genesis 15,13–14 in order to question or even undermine the presumptions of his opponents about their freedom. The motif of slavery in Gen 15,13–14 literally contradicts their claim to freedom as descendants from Abraham. In the second place, he uses the motif of Abraham's vision of the future in Genesis 15,13–14 and the motif of Abraham's death (Gen 15, 15) in order to build up or strengthen his own christological reasoning about the pre-existence of Jesus. In the latter case, his opponents provided the argument.

5. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the fact that John's originality does not lie in its picture of Abraham, but in the reinterpretation of existing images of Abraham is its use of the widely known terms 'seed of Abraham' and 'children of Abraham' as indicators for exclusion or inclusion.
6. After having investigated the question of exclusion and inclusion more closely, especially the provenance of the arguments in John 8,33.39ab about descent from Abraham, we concluded that the entire discussion may very well be based upon genuine arguments of John's Jewish Christian adversaries, although one must take into account that John altered their original reasoning and their original context(s). The second cluster of verses where the issue of descent from Abraham appears, John 8,39c–40, entirely reflects the arguments of the Johannine party. These arguments too were largely drawn from Jewish traditions about Abraham as the first believer in the one God and, possibly, from related traditions about his good works and merits. As said before, the entire context of John 8,31–47 makes it clear that John intends to exclude Christian Jews who oppose the Johannine view on Jesus from being Abraham's real children. The references to Abraham in the debate in the second part of our pericope (*vv* 48–59), do not seem to be based on genuine arguments of John's (Christian) Jewish opponents, with the notable exception of the widespread appeal to 'Abraham our father' and, possibly, the mention of Abraham and the prophets together in *vv* 52–53.
7. The question how Jesus, 'the Jews' and Abraham are interrelated, comes up at the moment when John defines true discipleship (*v* 31). Abraham is mentioned first by the opponents of Jesus, and John gives him an important role in his strategy to define who are 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The shift from the designation 'the Jews who had come to believe him' (*v* 31) to the designation 'the Jews' (*v* 48) must be understood as a shift from 'inside' to 'outside'. Taking into consideration the entire context of John 8,12–59, as well as

parallels in John 5 and John 9, where the role of Moses is part of the debate, the question is whether the designation applies to a restricted group can be answered in the affirmative. In all these conflicts the opposition is between Jesus and a group of people who obviously see themselves as the true heirs of Moses or Abraham.

8. The opponents in our pericope seem to belong to an even more restricted group. We are dealing with Jewish Christians, probably from a Pharisaic background (cf. 8,12–13), who are reckoned outsiders because of their (inadequate) beliefs about God and their (mis)understanding of the Scriptures. But the problem is that these beliefs are convictions that were at the heart of first-century Judaism as a whole, diverse and divergent as it was, and that they were not the monopoly of the Pharisees, who were the surviving faction after the war of 66–73 C.E. Moreover, although John's historical enemies probably came from Pharisaic circles, in the Fourth Gospel they have lost Pharisaic traits such as a strong commitment to the commandments and concern with the way these functioned in everyday life. John's emphasis on christology makes that there is hardly any place for issues regarding the sanctification of daily life that were so important to his opponents. Therefore, the people John calls 'the Jews' represent some kind of 'official' Judaism, but John tends to generalize this 'official' Judaism to such a degree that it can hardly be identified as typically Pharisaic.

9. Notwithstanding its typical use of Abraham traditions and the distinction between 'seed of Abraham' and 'children of Abraham' in particular, it goes too far to mark out John 8,31–59 as a new phase in the alienation between Christian and Jewish groups in the late first century C.E. The sectarian traits of the Johannine community make that it is widely regarded as a particular group, and by no means as a movement representative for early Christianity as a whole. In the period after the Fourth Gospel was written, things gradually changed. An anti-Jewish and exclusively

christological understanding of the Old Testament became prevalent in Christian circles. The reading of John undoubtedly contributed to this christologically inspired anti-Judaism, as we can learn from writings like Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. But this does not mean that the Fourth Gospel is a necessary and self-evident phase in a massive, linear, logical and inevitable historical process, starting with Paul and ending in the second century C.E. and with the absolute separation between Jews and Christians. It is more likely that John is a particular voice among many voices echoing a complicated, fragmented and contradictory history of closeness and estrangement, attraction and repulsion between two communities, each of them defining or redefining itself.

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ABBREVIATIONS

For references to the Bible & other ancient literature we follow the abbreviations used by the Catholic Biblical Quarterly

AnBib	Analecta biblica
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*
BETL	Bibiliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
Bijdr	*Bijdragen*
BZNW	Beihefte zur ZNW
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
C.E.	Common Era
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
EHS	Europäische Hochschulschriften
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HALAT	W. Baumgartner et al., Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*JSOT Supplement Series*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MT	Masoretic Text
NBV	Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling
NedTTs	*Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift*
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	*Novum Testamentum, Supplements*
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
ÖKTNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
PerspRelStud	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
POT	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
RB	*Revue biblique*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RvScPhTh	*Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SNTA	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia
St.Philon	*Studia Philonica*
TRE	*Theologische Realenzyclopädie*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Samenvatting

ABRAHAM IN JOHANNES 8,31–59

ZIJN BETEKENIS IN HET CONFLICT TUSSEN JOHANNEÏSCH CHRISTENDOM EN JOODSE OMGEVING

Voor het verstaan van de nieuwtestamentische geschriften is het onontbeerlijk een juist inzicht te verkrijgen in de manier waarop in deze geschriften het Oude Testament is verwerkt. De auteurs van het Nieuwe Testament gebruikten teksten en themata uit het Oude Testament om Jezus en de gebeurtenissen rondom hem en hun eigen verkondiging te legitimeren. Daarbij sloten zij aan bij tradities over Jezus die binnen de vroege christelijke gemeenschappen leefden. De wijze waarop deze gemeenschappen en de evangelisten het Oude Testament lazen was ingebed in de literaire en theologische wereld van het jodendom van de Tweede Tempelperiode—een wereld die zeer heterogeen was, mede door invloeden van buiten: Perzen, Grieken en Romeinen. Sinds enige decennia is men binnen de Nieuwtestamentische wetenschap steeds meer tot de overtuiging gekomen dat het Nieuwe Testament niet begrepen kan worden zonder kennis te nemen van het jodendom van de eerste eeuw van de christelijke jaartelling. Bestudering van bronnen uit deze periode, van de Apocrypha tot de documenten uit Qumran, van hellenistisch-joodse auteurs als Philo en Josephus tot vroege rabbijnse bronnen als Misjna en vroege Midrasjim, geeft ons inzicht in de joodse exegese van de eerste eeuw, waarvan ook het Nieuwe Testament zelf een uiting is.

In deze studie willen we beschrijven hoe een bepaalde passage uit het Nieuwe Testament, Johannes 8,31–59, ingebed is in deze joodse context. Johannes 8,31–59 bestaat uit een theologisch twistgesprek tussen Jezus en een groep personen die aangeduid worden als 'de joden die tot geloof gekomen waren aan hem'. De betreffende passage is om

verschillende redenen interessant en problematisch tegelijk. Ten eerste doet zich hier in zeer sterke mate de het gehele Johannesevangelie kenmerkende discrepantie voor tussen joodse en jodenchristelijke opvattingen en tradities enerzijds, en op het eerste gezicht zeer anti-joodse uitspraken anderzijds. In Joh 8,44 laat de evangelist Jezus zelfs tot zijn tegenstanders zeggen dat zij van de duivel stammen. Ten tweede wordt hier de figuur van Abraham opgevoerd, op wie beide partijen in het dispuut aanspraak maken om zich te legitimeren. Het twistgesprek draait voor een belangrijk deel om het vaderschap van Abraham en de verhouding tussen Jezus en Abraham; daarmee is het uiteindelijk een discussie over de interpretatie van het Oude Testament.

Gezien zowel de thematiek van de passage als de karakterisering van de gesprekspartners, is men in het Nieuwtestamentische onderzoek vaak geneigd Johannes 8,31–59 te zien als een weerspiegeling van de discussie tussen het zich ontwikkelende christendom en het farizeese jodendom. Gaandeweg het onderzoek bleek ons dat deze benadering te breed is, waardoor herformulering van de centrale probleemstelling noodzakelijk bleek. De kernvraag van deze studie is daarom: wat is de betekenis van Abraham in Joh 8,31–59 als deze passage wordt gelezen als weerspiegeling tussen het johanneïsch christendom en zijn joodse omgeving?

Alvorens tot de centrale vraagstelling te kunnen komen, dient eerst een analyse van de pericope zelf plaats te vinden. In hoofdstuk 1 wordt vastgesteld of het tekstgedeelte waarin Abraham aan de orde komt zich van zijn tekstuele omgeving onderscheidt. Met name de afbakening tussen 8,30 en 8,31 roept vragen op, in het bijzonder waar het de identiteit van de in Jezus gelovende joden betreft: betreft deze aanduiding in zowel 8,30 en 8,31 eenzelfde of twee verschillende groepen personen? De conclusie in dit proefschrift luidt dat de dubbele aanduiding begrepen moet worden uit stilistisch oogpunt en dat zij dezelfde groep mensen betreft. Vervolgens wordt ingegaan op de vraag hoe de tekst is opgebouwd. We gaan daarbij uit van het oude voorstel van

M.-J. Lagrange om de tekst in twee blokken te delen (8,31–47 en 8,48–58[59]) en onderscheiden verder een aantal zogeheten argumenten, die elk dezelfde structuur vertonen: opening, reactie/ discussie en afsluiting.

In hoofdstuk 2 wordt de pericope beschreven aan de hand van verschillende methoden: close reading of narratieve kritiek, stijlkritiek, vorm- en redactiekritiek. Doel van dit hoofdstuk is om te bepalen of Joh 8,31–59, met name die delen waarin Abraham voorkomt, een betekenisvol en coherent geheel is, en of eventuele oneffenheden en spanningen in de tekst te verklaren zijn op grond van de ontstaansgeschiedenis van de tekst. Deze ontstaansgeschiedenis zou op haar beurt een weerslag kunnen zijn van het conflict tussen Johanneïsch christendom en joodse groeperingen aan het einde van de eerste eeuw van de christelijke jaartelling. Voor de paragrafen over stijlkritiek en vorm- en redactiekritiek hebben we gekozen voor een evaluatie van bestaande literatuur over Joh 8,31–59, de close reading is het resultaat van eigen analyse. Aan de hand van zowel de close reading als de evaluatie van bestaande literatuur concluderen we dat er geen specifieke gelaagdheid in de tekst aangetoond kan worden. Hiermee kan ook de hypothese dat aan de hand van de tekst een mogelijke ontwikkeling in een historische discussie aan te tonen valt, niet volgehouden worden. Aan de andere kant blijft het probleem dat de thematische en narratieve spanningen in de tekst – zie vooral de abrupte overgang van 'geloof aan Jezus ' in *v*31 naar de wens hem te doden in *v*37—niet afdoende verklaard kunnen worden uit het verloop van de tekst zelf. Evenmin verklaart de close reading het beeld van Abraham dat hier geschetst wordt. Deze twee vragen worden in de volgende hoofdstukken onderzocht, te beginnen met manier waarop Johannes Abraham beschrijft.

Hoofdstuk 3 is gewijd aan de inventarisatie van tradities rond Abraham die relevant zijn voor Joh 8,31–59. Daarbij wordt uitgegaan van die thematieken waarmee Abraham in het Johannesevangelie verbonden wordt: Abraham als vader van de joden en de joden als Abrahams nakomelingen; Abrahams geloof en trouw, zijn monotheïsme en goede

werken; Abraham en vrijheid respectievelijk slavernij; Abraham als ziener; de vreugde van Abraham; de dood van Abraham. Onderzochte bronnen zijn in de eerste plaats het Oude Testament, waarbij vanzelfsprekend het zwaartepunt ligt bij de Abrahamcyclus in het boek Genesis, en vroegjoodse geschriften waarin de voor dit onderzoek relevante gegevens uit Genesis verwoord en geïnterpreteerd worden: allereerst de Apocriefen en Pseudo-epigrafen, geschriften van Qumran, Philo en Flavius Josephus. Vanzelfsprekend vormen ook de overige geschriften van het Nieuwe Testament een belangrijke bron. In beperkter mate wordt een beroep gedaan op de Targumim en vroegrabbijnse geschriften, in nog mindere mate op vroegchristelijke bronnen als de Apostolische Vaders. De inventarisatie levert voor elk onderscheiden aspect van Abraham een aantal parallellen op, al variëren zowel het aantal plaatsen en bronnen, als het karakter van deze bronnen. De conclusie is gerechtvaardigd dat het Johannesevangelie wat betreft zijn 'Abrahamologie' inderdaad ingebed is in de brede 'Abrahamologie' van het jodendom in de Tweede Tempelperiode. Hiermee is echter nog niet aangetoond op welke tradities of teksten het Johannesevangelie daadwerkelijk steunt, noch hoe en waarom het deze interpreteert of herinterpreteert.

Hoofdstuk 4 legt allereerst de meest relevante paralleltekSten naast de passages over Abraham in Joh 8,31–59, met het doel laatstgenoemde in verband te brengen met bestaande opvattingen over Abraham en waar mogelijk te verhelderen. Voor een aantal van de hierboven genoemde aspecten van het Johanneïsche Abrahambeeld kan geconcludeerd worden dat zij dusdanig frequent en breed vertegenwoordigd zijn, dat niet exact valt te bepalen waar de oorsprong van Johannes' beschrijving gezocht moet worden. Dit geldt vooral voor het beeld van Abraham als vader van de joden, Abraham als de man die in de ene God gelooft en vanuit zijn geloof en vertrouwen goede werken verricht, en de associatie van Abraham met vrijheid en verlossing. Johannes' Abrahambeeld blijkt echter enkele details te kennen die nauwelijks of niet in deze specifieke combinatie voorkomen: de algemene term 'werken van

Abraham' (Joh 8, 39) kent slechts enkele parallellen, de combinatie van visioen en vreugde (Joh 8,56) komt voor zover we weten verder alleen voor in het boek Jubileeën. Het verdient daarom de voorkeur voorzichtig te zijn met conclusies omtrent het gebruik door Johannes van specifieke bronnen, en eerder te spreken van stromingen en tendensen binnen de exegese van de eerste eeuw waarbinnen ook Johannes een plaats heeft. Wat betreft de oorsprong van al deze tradities, de Abrahamcyclus in Genesis, lijken vooral de teksten en exegese van Genesis 15, 18 en 21 van belang te zijn, waarbij vooral verder onderzoek naar de *Wirkungsgeschichte* van Genesis 15 in de (vroegjoodse en vroegchristelijke) exegese interessant zal zijn. Het specifieke van het Johanneïsche Abrahambeeld blijkt niet te liggen in de originaliteit van de afzonderlijke facetten, maar in de theologische duiding: in Joh 8,31–47, waarin het accent ligt op de relatie tussen Abraham en Jezus' gesprekspartners, 'de joden die tot geloof gekomen waren aan hem', wordt duidelijk dat zij niet Abrahams ware kinderen en erfgenamen kunnen zijn. In Joh 8,48–58(59), waarin het accent ligt op de relatie tussen Abraham en Jezus, wordt met verwijzing naar Abraham betoogd dat Jezus zowel in positie als in tijd vóór Abraham komt; de gecompliceerde passage Joh 8,56–58 is in dit verband cruciaal.

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt de polemiek van Joh 8,31–59 gesitueerd binnen het veronderstelde conflict tussen het Johanneïsch christendom en het jodendom van zijn tijd. Daarbij gaan we allereerst in op de gecompliceerde vraag rond de identiteit en betekenis van οι 'Ιουδαῖοι ('de joden') in het Johannesevangelie. Een opvallend kenmerk dat Johannes onderscheidt van de synoptische evangeliën is zijn veelvuldig en overwegend negatief gebruik van de aanduiding οἱ 'Ιουδαῖοι – een term die vooral door niet-joden gebruikt werd om joden aan te duiden of door joden zelf in bijzijn van niet-joden – binnen een geschiedenis waarin alle hoofdpersonen joods zijn. Dit heeft in de Nieuwtestamentische wetenschap geleid tot de veronderstelling dat a) het Johannesevangelie de weerslag is van een controverse tussen de Johanneïsche gemeenschap en haar

joodse omgeving, en b) dat dit jodendom farizees en normatief was. De analyse van die passages waarin 'de joden' en verwante groepen een rol spelen, leert ons dat zij niet uitsluitend een negatieve rol vervullen, maar dat tegelijkertijd hun positieve houding enigszins ambigue blijft. Daarnaast blijkt οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι gebruikt te worden om verschillende groepen aan te duiden. De theorie dat men dient te onderscheiden tussen een 'Johanneïsch' en een 'neutraal' gebruik van οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, waarbij het eerste staat voor joodse autoriteiten, het tweede voor het jodendom in algemene zin, doet geen recht aan het feit dat ook schijnbaar neutrale aanduidingen nog altijd deel uitmaken van Johannes' theologische retoriek en daarom nooit neutraal zijn. De identificatie van ὁι Ἰουδαῖοι met farizeese autoriteiten is om twee reden problematisch. Allereerst thematisch: de discussies tussen hen en Jezus gaan slechts dan over de voor de farizeese beweging(en) essentiële halachische kwesties wanneer deze christologische uiteenzettingen dienen. Ten tweede is het historische beeld van een sterke farizeese beweging die de macht had om mensen uit de joodse gemeenschap te verbannen (gebaseerd op de term ἀποσυνάγωγος in Joh 9,22, 12,42 en 16,2) niet correct en hebben we hier waarschijnlijk te maken met een kleiner, wellicht zelfs lokaal conflict, waarin sprake is van twee ideologisch van elkaar vervreemd rakende groepen. Wat Joh 8,31–59 betreft, constateren we dat οι Ἰουδαῖοι staat voor een groep die zich aanvankelijk aangetrokken voelt tot de leer van Jezus en daarom aangesproken wordt als 'in-group'. De abrupte overgang naar vijandigheid maakt deel uit van Johannes' polemiek, waarin vrij eendimensionale karakters een symbolische functie hebben. Voor een identificatie van Jezus' tegenstanders in Joh 8,31–59 met afvallige leden van de Johanneïsche gemeenschap die informant worden van de farizeese autoriteiten, zoals voorgesteld door J. Louis Martyn, bestaat geen overtuigend bewijs. Het verwijt dat hun gemaakt wordt is niet dat zij loyaal proberen te zijn aan twee leren of groepen, de farizeese en de Johanneïsche, maar dat zij ontrouw zijn aan de laatste. Wat hier, zoals op andere plaatsen in het Johannesevangelie, van de toehoorders gevraagd wordt is een radi-

cale keuze voor Jezus als de Zoon. Gezien het feit dat in Joh 8,31–32 deze toehoorders aangesproken worden als leerlingen dient Joh 8,31–59 gelezen te worden tegen de achtergrond van andere passages over het leerlingschap, waarvan vooral 6,60–71 van belang is. Op grond van het voorafgaande en van de vergelijking met dergelijke passages lijkt de conclusie gerechtvaardigd dat Joh 8,31–59 de weerslag vormt van een ervaring binnen de Johanneïsche gemeenschap zelf, waarvan een aantal leden zich afkeerde omdat zij zich niet (meer) kon verenigen met de radicale, 'hoge' Johanneïsche christologie. De aanmoediging om ware leerlingen (*v* 31) en daardoor vrij te worden (*v* 32) wordt door hen gezien als een aanval op diepgewortelde en diepgekoesterde overtuigingen, waarvan hun afstamming van Abraham een belangrijk fundament vormt. Daarom wordt zowel door henzelf als door Jezus in Johannes 8 een beroep gedaan op de figuur Abraham. Door het christologische perspectief van Johannes blijft het echter discutabel in hoeverre de woorden die de tegenstanders van Jezus in de mond gelegd worden een correct beeld vormen van argumenten met betrekking tot Abraham die door Johannes' tegenstanders werkelijk gebruikt zijn.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Catharina Cornelia Maria de Lange, born on 12th November 1959 at Wormer, was educated at the St. Michaelcollege Zaandam (Atheneum-A) (1972–1978). She studied theology at the Catholic Theological University Amsterdam and graduated in 1987. Principal subject: the exegesis of the Old Testament. She has worked as a teacher of religion in a secondary school, a junior researcher New Testament at the University of Theology and Pastorate at Heerlen and the Catholic University Nijmegen, an advisor for religious education in primary schools and as an editor and writer of materials for religious education in primary schools. Since 2002 she is staff member of the Catholic Council for the Relations with the Jews (Utrecht) and secretary of the Commission for the Relations with the Jews of the Dutch bishops.

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Abraham in John 8,31-59:
His Significance in the Conflict between Johannine Christianity and its Jewish Environment

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Cobbenhagen building
Warandelaan 2
Tilburg

Receptie na afloop van de promotie
in de Goossenszaal.

Tineke de Lange
Dorpsstraat 264
1531 HV Wormer

Paranimfen:
Lia de Lange
Tel. 020 - 4630 752
Jaap van der Meij

The topic of this doctoral thesis (Theology faculty, *University of Tilburg*) is John 8,31–59, the Johannine representation of the discussion, or rather the dispute between Jesus and a group, which John identifies as *Jews*. In this quarrel the difference between Jewish-christian and Jewish ideas and traditions crystallizes and becomes, at first sight, the sediment which did nurture anti-Jewish sentiments within the early Christian communities. In John 8,44 the writer f.e. claims that Jesus' opponents are children of the devil.

These fragments in the Fourth Gospel show that the Jewish-christians, just as their Jewish kinsmen claimed older traditions. They both maintained that Abraham was their father. This claim and the subsequent treatment of this theme in the Fourth Gospel has turned this selection into an exegetical revaluation of the Tenach/Old Testament.

Dr. Tineke de Lange seeks to prove that these verses in the Johannine Gospel are the result of an experience within the Johannine community itself, when some of its members left the group, fundamentally disagreeing with the radical Johannine christology. They thought that the admonition to become free men was an attack on their deapseated convictions and unwavering beliefs.

TINEKE DE LANGE (1959) *studied theology at the Catholic Theological University Amsterdam and graduated in 1987. She was a junior researcher at the* UTP *Heerlen and the Radboud University Nijmegen. Dr. de Lange was an advisor, editor and writer of materials for religious education in primary schools. Since 2002 she is a staff member of* KRI, *the Catholic Council for the Relations with the Jews (Utrecht) and secretary of the Commission for the Relations with the Jews of the Dutch bishops.*

AMPHORA BOOKS